

12 Aggressive behavior

This module deals with working with students who display aggressive behaviour towards people in the school environment, both towards the teacher and other students.

The module consists of two parts.

The first part deals with actions of a preventive character such as minimizing stress.

The second part discusses concrete procedures of dealing with aggressive behaviour of a student.

The key to effective education, and above all, effective educational activities is a good relationship between teacher and student.

The positive nature of a good relationship between teacher and student is demonstrated by mutual trust, kindness and respect.

It is the teacher who plays the leading role in the formation of such a relationship even if the student behaves in an aggressive way.

How can the teacher build a good relationship with the pupil?

First of all, by looking for and finding individual possibilities and potentialities of the student.

Also by keeping faith in the student, in his good intentions and respect the student even if he behaves in an aggressive way.

An important principle in working with emotional students is to be careful not to spark the fire of their strong emotions.

Since stress is the most common reason for strong negative emotions to surface in students, the teacher's first priority is to minimize stress.

The teacher will achieve this goal by: not asking surprise questions, not forcing students to answer, not comparing students with one another, not engaging in humiliating criticism of students, not assuming a position of superiority toward students, and not formulating vague or impossible expectations.

What if, despite attempts to reduce stress, a teacher is confronted with aggressive behaviour of a student?

Before taking any specific corrective action, it is worthwhile for the teacher to realize that his priority is to ensure the safety of the students and himself.

At the same time, the teacher must not break the good relationship with the student by withdrawing the respect due to the student.

Let's now turn to the procedure to be applied when aggressive behavior is displayed.

It consists of seven steps.

The first step is to become aware of one's own feelings that have arisen in response to the student's aggressive behaviour.

The precondition for the correct execution of this step, is to concentrate on one's own emotions as soon as possible.

Postponing the identification of the own emotional state is unhelpful.

Therefore, immediately after the student's aggressive behaviour, try to answer honestly the question: "what is going on inside me, what feelings am I struggling with?"

Step two is about preventing the escalation of aggressive actions.

It is imperative that the teacher rejects the urge to revenge and use power.

Although the natural reaction to aggression seems to be aggression, stop it.

Do not allow forceful actions, such as, "I will show you!"

This is a powerful trap. Be sure to engage your curiosity.

Try to face the question: "What is the student trying to tell me through this aggressive behavior?"

The teacher can move on to step three when the danger of revenge has been overcome.

This involves performing an emotional flip-flop.

Although teachers already know their own feeling, including anger, perhaps rage or helplessness, they will now treat these feelings as if they are not theirs.

It has come to them from a student and is information about him, not about the teacher.

Taking step four is to read the information contained in the aggressive behavior of a student.

The anger and helplessness the teacher is experiencing is the anger and helplessness of the student.

Because the student can't cope with these feelings, he throws them out in the form of aggressive behavior.

This expression probably gives him temporary relief.

The fifth step is to develop increasing curiosity and investigation about the information in the list.

The teacher helps himself with questions such as:

What is the student talking about?

What does he need?

For what purpose is he acting so aggressively?

The teacher comes to a sincere preoccupation with the meaning of the student's behaviour.

Step six is to absolutely reject ineffective, deceptive solutions.

When the teacher is curious about the meanings of a student's behavior, he will not pretend that nothing happened.

Since not reacting is a manifestation of passivity and helplessness of the teacher, this attitude will most likely encourage the student to reinforce his aggressive behavior.

Neither will the teacher enter into a discussion with a student when his emotions have the force of a powerful fire.

The teacher rejects any form of violence against the student.

He will refrain from physical, verbal, as well as emotional aggression.

The teacher will not use his authority as a teacher to intimidate a student, threaten him with consequences that he cannot carry out.

Nor will the teacher take offense at him, demonstrating his resentment.

When the teacher concentrates attention on himself and not on the student, he will lose the opportunity to read the meaning of the information the student wants to convey to the teacher.

The final seventh step deals with constructive, and thus educationally effective, solutions.

The teacher can take these successfully as long as he follows the previous six steps thoroughly.

So, first, when a student's aggression threatens others, the teacher should definitely take him out of the classroom and give him time to calm down.

His emotions will settle, he will cool down, and only then can the teacher have a respectful dialogue with the student.

Second, the teacher can try to turn anger into distress by using the following examples:

"I can see that you are having a hard time for some reason.

I'd be happy to talk to you about it, but right now it's important that you let me and others enjoy the lesson."

The teacher can also set a time for a "one on one" conversation, in which he expresses his concern for the student.

It is important that the teacher sets clear rules for behavior and a consequence for not following them.

Finally, the teacher should reward any behavior he considers desirable and indicate beneficial change.

And don't forget: appreciate any attempt to make an effort and show good intentions.