

Westlake Christian School Elementary Classroom Guidance Newsletter
Lesson Eight: Assertive vs. Aggressive Behavior

Dear Parents,

In Lesson Eight, the students learned the differences between assertive and aggressive behaviors (particularly as they relate to conflict resolution). Christianity turns weak people into men and women of strength and courage. We have access to the power of life and grace that gives us the opportunity to be truly assertive in the way we live our lives. Jesus was the personification of healthy, assertive living. That does not mean Jesus was rude, obnoxious, bossy, or power-hungry. Those are the negative characteristics of an aggressive person. Aggressive means being hostile and quarrelsome. Many confrontations were forced on Jesus in the Gospels, but it was His adversaries who were the aggressive ones. People who act aggressively do so from a position of weakness. When you are afraid, feeling trapped and insecure, that's when you're prone to lash out. How did Jesus respond to aggression? He never got in a screaming match with anybody. He didn't have to. Instead, Jesus embraced the truth and stood His ground. He was meek and mild, humble and loving, spending His life giving Himself away. But he accomplished these things from a position of strength. Through His special relationship with God the Father, Jesus was always in balance. That doesn't mean Jesus never got angry at injustice; He just never got out of control. Jesus' assertive behavior wasn't only limited to confrontations with adversaries. The way He related to everybody was always direct, bold and positive and always loving and graceful.

Assertive behaviors were reinforced with activities that focused on how conflicts escalate and de-escalate and the conflict response styles of assertive, aggressive, and passive.

Ages and Stages of Aggressive Behavior

Typically, children direct their aggressive behaviors toward other children more often than toward adults. Children display their anger inappropriately because they do not have good coping strategies. Children do not understand how situations or actions can evoke angry feelings. Something triggers a reaction in the child and they do not know how to respond.

The Five-Year-Old Child: Five-year-old children want to be "good" and would rather stay with what is comfortable than try new things. Children at this age often exhibit some tantrums and sulking when they become upset.

The Six-Year-Old Child: When you are around a six-year-old, you never know what will happen because they rarely make up their mind. The six-year-old is striving for independence and displays an intense need to be the first and best. This causes much anxiety for them. They also want to have everyone's attention. The six-year-old can be very loud and bossy.

The Seven-Year-Old Child: Seven-year-old children tend to withdraw when things become difficult and to look inward at themselves. They start thinking about the world around them. Worry becomes a major preoccupation, and they show increased concern with what is fair versus what is unfair.

The Eight-Year-Old Child: The eight-year-old child is inquisitive; interested in everything that is going on. Friction and jealousy frequently arise when children rival each other to get adults' attention. It is very easy to hurt the feelings of an eight-year-old.

The Nine-Year-Old Child: Nine-year-old children do not want to be told what to do by their parents. They resent these directions and often rebel. These children can often be found fighting, complaining, criticizing, and ignoring their parents.

What Parents Need to Know About Assertiveness and Elementary-Age Children

Children meet situations every day in which they must decide how to balance their own interests in relation to the interests of other people. In these situations, children need to know that they have choices. They can go on the attack. They can stand up for their interests and convictions. Or they can give in,

going along with the other person's request, even though they don't want to. Adults call these choices "aggression", "assertiveness", and "submission". With children, we speak of "being mean", "being strong", and "giving in".

Although we are partial to assertiveness, there is no one right way to respond to the myriad of complex situations children (or adults) confront daily. Sometimes we'll agree to "give in" and let a friend join us even if we really want to be alone. We may see that the friend is feeling blue and needs some companionship; or perhaps the friend has a compelling reason for spending time with us now (she's going away or has something important to tell us). Sometimes we may need to be very firm to get our point across to someone who just isn't getting it, and that person may experience us as mean.

Our aim is that children learn to think flexibly in order to come up with the approach that fits the situation and develop skills to carry it out. This means showing children they have a range of choices in any given situation and expanding their repertoire of ways to be strong. Too often children (and adults) in our society fall into the habit of being aggressive or submissive rather than taking the path that is usually most effective in the long run: assertiveness.

Assertiveness is a stance towards life and involves a set of skills we can practice and improve. With young children, we focus on the most basic skills of assertiveness: saying no; making a strong, clear, confident statement of what you want; and using "I" messages.

Assertiveness Resources

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/momsense/2000/novdec/11.40.html>

http://www.christianadvice.net/be_assertive.htm

http://www.cbn.com/family/parenting/Coughlin_ParentWimps.aspx

<http://nehemiahministries.com/assert2.htm>

<http://www.orthodoxytoday.org/articles6/MorelliAssertiveness.php>

Sincerely,
Heidi Jolliffe
Classroom Guidance Coordinator