



Difficult Personality Traits, part 4 of 5—

Actively Aggravating

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With the increase of diagnoses and the use of drug therapy as the strategy of choice for the *aggressive child*, it is becoming necessary that we as teachers and parents understand the mind of these students.

Across the board, professionals agree that drug therapy alone does not offer these students the strategies needed to cope with the intricacies of life's decisions. It is still necessary that the children learn about their tendencies and how they can best re-direct their activity and/or aggression needs.

First, let's define or describe *active/aggressive* children. They are generally characterized as on-the-go, impulsive, aggressive, acting instead of talking, trouble making, angry, sensation-seeking, risk-taking, daredevils, energetic, creative, enthusiastic, charismatic, and leaders.

It is readily apparent that these children can grow into God-led, Spirit-filled dynamos for the kingdom. Unfortunately, it is also possible for them to grow into gang-leading, immoral, con-people.

Why are these students difficult to have in the classroom?

Usually it is because their agenda and need for attention or sensory stimulation takes over the classroom atmosphere. Teachers grow weary of trying to keep them busy, trying to keep them out of other's space bubbles, or trying to keep them from dismantling the furniture. Most classrooms are not set up to

address the needs of these students. Most offer formal seating (desk, or tables with chairs) and expect the students to sit, wait, and listen.

The essence of these children is motion...they tend to crave sensory input and may become frustrated when tight controls are enforced. They probably struggle with motor or movement planning (may have their feet in the aisle



or be flailing their arms around inappropriately). Too often, they come across as "too rough" and "accidentally" hurting others, thusly, making enemies. They may turn to even riskier behaviors when under stress and may lash out when they're on overload.

What's a teacher to do?

The goals then become to teach these children self-control, to lead them into self-understanding, to use their energy for positive behaviors, and to begin leading instead of aggravating.

We will still need to assume for the sake of this article that we are dealing with "simply active/aggressive" children rather than

the Anti-Social Aggressive Child, the Attention Deficit (Processing Difficulty) Child, or the Touch Dominant Child. This article is assuming that the children are neither psychopathic in their behavior nor are they struggling to process the information around them.

Patterns to avoid

These children give off verbal and non-verbal cues as to what they're feeling. Don't ignore these cues. For example, Lisa may throw down her pencil and mumble, "I can't do this." Do not ignore this cue or treat it with casual reassurance, such as saying, "Sure you can." Realize that Lisa is frustrated, and unlike other types of temperaments, Lisa will act aggressively very shortly if you do not intervene. Simple interventions could include statements such as: "Why don't you come over here by me, Lisa. I've got another craft that I think you might enjoy." "I'd like to help you learn this information, I'm sure we can find another way to study it." "Lisa, it feels like you're frustrated. What would help your frustration level right now?" (Suggestions: a drink of water, a walk, new project, snack, talking it over.)

Along with reading her cues, be sure to communicate your own. Don't assume she knows you are trying to help. Tell her, "I'd like to help. What can I do?"

Secondly, try not to vacillate between good guy/bad guy reactions. You are trying to role model consistency. Set up a game plan with the child and be consistent.

Thirdly, find ways for them to express their anger and frustration. Bopping a pillow, balloon, or Bop bag is not the same as hurting another person and can be a great alternative. Provide anger-release activities for these students. (Running, exercise, etc. may help. Note: Use these activities as energy redirectives, not as punishments. Restricting these children from activities can cause more problems. They need the out-door time, recess, breaks, games, etc. Find another form of discipline rather than physical activity restrictions.)

Fourthly, don't immediately restrict or immediately permit these children to do something. Build in calm time, time for you and them to process the direction

their behavior is going and the consequences that are coming. For example, "Lisa, you're getting overly active, and I'm concerned someone will get hurt. Let's stop and think how we can prevent that."

Patterns to Practice

There are many patterns to practice with these children. Some include the following:

Interact

1. Have lots of little interactions with these children. You need to be able to trust one another. They need to know that you'll be fair and that you have their best interests at heart.

Pretend

2. Encourage pretend play. Help them explore behavioral options through this type of play.

Reflect

3. Promote reflective thinking.

Think out loud, "I wonder why you're all over the room tonight, and what I can do to help you control your behavior?" or "I can see this activity calms you down. I wonder why?"

Give

4. These children need more of you—more security, warmth, and engagement.

They don't necessarily know why they have this compulsion to act aggressively, but they do feel the sting of rejection it can produce from others. You can be the mirror that helps these children see that they are gifts from God—that all this energy and aggression can be directed to help build the Kingdom of God. God needs all of us. Pray that the Lord will give you the wisdom, patience, and strategies to guide these children into fulfilling God's plan for their lives.

Questions For Further Study—

1. Name the primary characteristic of active/aggressive children.
2. What are some patterns to avoid in dealing with active/aggressive children?
3. What can you as a children's worker do to address the needs of the active/aggressive children in your church?