



## PARENTING TEENS

For ease of reading 'he' is used for the abusive child. It is recognised that 'she' could also be used. Change to suit your child's sex.

**Aggression or violence towards parents by their children or teenagers is more common than most people believe. It is something that is not usually talked about, and has not attracted much publicity or research. It can involve abusive language, frightening, threatening or physically hurting a parent (pushing, shoving, kicking, throwing things), hurting pets, damaging furniture and property, or threatening with knives or weapons.**

**Children are violent towards parents in a range of situations and there is not one simple explanation for every situation.**

**Whether it is a one-off incident or ongoing, it must be dealt with.**

## Why are children 'aggro'?

Children may be aggressive towards parents for a number of reasons.

None of the following reasons excuse violent or 'aggro' behaviour, but they may help parents understand why some children, especially teenagers do it.

- They have not learnt how to control or manage their feelings, especially angry ones and so just lash out without using any self discipline.
- They have grown up in a household where they have seen adults (sometimes parents or partners) being angry, and using violence towards them or others (this behaviour is seen as normal in their eyes).
- They do not know of any other way to solve problems or get what they want (lashing out at someone or something is all they know).
- They have not learnt to value or respect other people or their property.
- Drugs or alcohol, mental illness, the loss of a job or a broken relationship can all be triggers that lead to violence.
- They see the parent as weak and powerless (it is often the mother), or they think that this is how women can be treated.
- They may be going through a really difficult time and cannot cope with the stresses in their own lives.
- They can become increasingly violent as they get more involved with peers in a violent lifestyle.

## What parents can do

Most parents whose children attack them in this way can feel very scared, very powerless, lonely, sometimes embarrassed, ashamed and guilty. They feel they have lost control in the home.

- Remember that whatever has happened in your relationship with your teenager, there is no excuse for violence.
- Be prepared to make some tough decisions, even though your confidence feels shattered.
- You need to take some control in your home. You may not be able to change or stop your teenager's behaviour, but you can take a stand for what you are prepared to put up with in your home. This is important especially if there are younger children who may feel frightened and need your help to feel safe.
- Think what the fights are most often about. Work out what things you are not prepared to move your position on, what ones you are prepared to give way on and what you can leave for your teenager to sort out.
- Look at your child's behaviour—what is acceptable, what is dangerous, what is abusive?
- Think about what happens as a fight brews. What are the warning signs? When these signs are present, make sure you separate from each other (you may have to leave the house). If so, take your younger children with you so they don't become the victims of violence. Talk about concerns only when you are both calm.



THIS GUIDE AND OTHERS ARE AVAILABLE ONLINE

- Look at the situation from your teenager's point of view, no matter how unreasonable it seems. Think about how your behaviour (from his point of view) might be contributing to the situation (even if you don't think it could be).
- If the behaviour is out of character for your teenager and has started only recently, think about what else may have happened or changed lately. For example, has anyone new had contact with your family recently or have there been changes in the family or with his friends? Has anything happened in these relationships?
- Notice what your teenager does well and talk to him about it. Teenagers especially do not need reminders of their failures.
- Spend some time supporting what he likes doing if he will let you, for example, watching him play sport or listening to his music.
- Think about your favourite image of your teenage son. Do you still think of him as he was when he was little? You may need to come to grips with the fact that he is no longer a child.
- If your other children are being harmed in any way by your teenager, you must do something to protect them.
- Be very clear about what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour in your home, and what behaviour needs to be changed.
- Decide what is your 'bottom line'. You need to be very clear and carry out what you have said will happen when he has overstepped this line. This may mean your teenager leaves your home either by agreement or by using the police and/or a restraining order. You may find this very hard to do. Get support from someone who understands.
- Although taking a tough stand can be difficult it is very important to do. When a teenager is violent toward a parent, no matter how much she might excuse her behaviour ('It was really her fault', 'She pushed me to it') she can never feel all right about it. If she is never made to stop, she will probably repeat the same pattern in other relationships or in the work place. It will continue to cause problems in her life and can even lead to problems with the law unless she is stopped and can learn other ways to deal with her anger. Taking a tough stand helps to force your child to face her violence—she then has the chance to learn other ways of dealing with anger.
- If nothing seems to be working for you, it is important to get professional help.
- Don't try to handle it all alone for fear of what others might think.

## Reminders

- Find out what works for other people.
- Look after your self-esteem—you may feel you have lost it altogether or it needs repairing.
- Take some control—for the sake of yourself, your child and your other children.
- You can love your child but you do not have to put up with all behaviour.
- Decide on your bottom line, make it known in advance, mean it and carry it out.
- Deal with this problem—it won't go away.
- Speak to someone who understands this sort of behaviour and who can support you.

## Want more information?

ParentLink	<a href="http://www.parentlink.act.gov.au">www.parentlink.act.gov.au</a>	13 34 27
Parentline (9am–9pm Monday–Friday, except public holidays)		6287 3833
Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service		6205 1971
Child and Youth Health (a number of different topics in the 'youth' section)	<a href="http://www.cyh.com">www.cyh.com</a>	
Domestic Violence Crisis Service (24hrs)	<a href="http://www.dvcs.org.au">www.dvcs.org.au</a>	6280 0900
Family and Adolescent Counselling Service		6162 6100
Family Relationships Advice Line	<a href="http://www.familyrelationships.gov.au">www.familyrelationships.gov.au</a>	1800 050 321
Health First	<a href="http://www.healthfirst.net.au">www.healthfirst.net.au</a>	6207 7777
Kids Help Line	<a href="http://www.kidshelp.com.au">www.kidshelp.com.au</a>	1800 55 1800
Lifeline	<a href="http://www.lifeline.org.au">www.lifeline.org.au</a>	13 11 14
Police	000 (emergency) or	13 14 44
Relationships Australia	<a href="http://www.relationships.com.au">www.relationships.com.au</a>	1300 364 277

## See other ParentLink guides

- Discipline (teens)
- Living with teens
- What about parents' rights?

Produced by ParentLink  
Department of Disability, Housing  
& Community Services  
GPO Box 158 Canberra ACT 2601  
Tel: 13 34 27 Fax: 6205 0968  
Email: [parentlink@act.gov.au](mailto:parentlink@act.gov.au)

© Parenting SA  
Government of South Australia  
[www.parenting.sa.gov.au](http://www.parenting.sa.gov.au)  
Revised 0607