

# Including Kids at Church Who Behave Aggressively

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# Learning Objectives:

- ❑ Identify characteristics of kids who are predisposed to aggressive behavior
- ❑ Explore strategies for establishing ministry environments that reduce risk of aggressive behavior
- ❑ Review approaches for intervening when kids are escalating toward or exhibiting aggressive behavior
- ❑ Discuss ministry strategies when the risk associated with a child's aggressive behavior prevents inclusion at church

# Subtypes of aggressive behavior:

## Reactive aggression:

- Affect: fear, anger
- Arousal level: high
- Outcome: negative
- Impulsive
- Reactive
- Defensive
- Overt
- Hostile

## Predatory aggression

- Affect: self-confidence
- Arousal level: low
- Outcome: positive for self
- Controlled
- Predatory
- Offensive
- Covert
- Instrumental

Vitiello B, Stott DM. *J Am Acad Child Adolesc Psychiatry* 1997; 36(3) 307-315

# Definition of maladaptive aggression:

- ***Aggressive behavior that occurs outside an acceptable social context***

Maladaptive behavior is characterized by:

Intensity, frequency, duration and severity are disproportionate to its causes

May occur in absence of antecedent social cues

Behavior not terminated in expected time frame, or in response to feedback

Jensen P et al. *J Am Acad Child Adolesc Psychiatry* 2007; 46(3): 309-322

# Traits associated with maladaptive aggression:

- ❑ Difficulty with behavioral inhibition, emotional self-regulation
- ❑ Irritability as predominant mood
- ❑ Misperception of social cues
- ❑ Misinterpretation of environmental risk
- ❑ Difficulty with communication
- ❑ Cognitive rigidity...propensity to get “stuck”

# What situations at church may increase a child's risk for aggressive behavior?

- ❑ Initial visits to an unfamiliar church
- ❑ Transition times before/after children's activities
- ❑ Chaotic, unstructured activities
- ❑ Kids transitioning from one area to another in building
- ❑ Excessive sensory stimulation
- ❑ Unfamiliar staff, volunteers
- ❑ Following high stimulation, high energy activities
- ❑ Evening activities (time course effects of medications, fatigue)

# Environment shapes behavior!

***The more sensory input a child has to process, the less mental capacity remains for self-control.***

Consider...

- ❑ Visual input/clutter, lighting, use of color
- ❑ Use of pictures to assist in communication
- ❑ Effects of loud noise
- ❑ Touch...not everyone likes it
- ❑ Comfortable seating
- ❑ <http://drgrcevich.files.wordpress.com/2011/11/inclusion-fusion-2011-harmony-welcomingenvironments.pdf>

# Space Planning & Sensory Issues

- ❑ Open check-in area with neutral tones and plotter images to reduce visual clutter



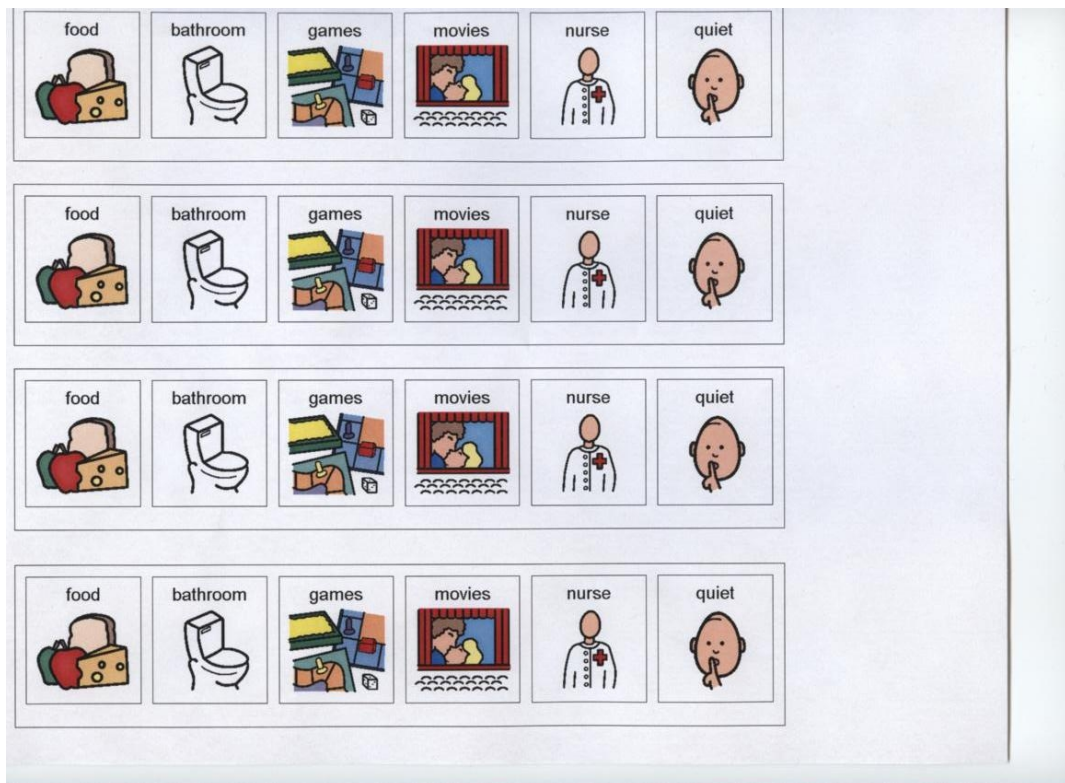
# Space Planning & Sensory Issues

- Vineyard Student Union (middle school and senior high ministry)



# Communication aides:

- Communication keys used to enhance volunteer name tags
- <http://www.keyministry.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/PM-Appendix-3r-Sample-Communication-Key-and-Signage.pdf>



# Keys to Behavior Management

- Before
- During
- After

# Before...

- Pray
- Create your classroom/respite culture
  - ▣ Encouragement
  - ▣ Expectations
- Plan proactively
  - ▣ Physical arrangement of the room
  - ▣ Staffing
  - ▣ Content of the lesson
  - ▣ Pace of the lesson
  - ▣ “In the event of an emergency...”

# During: First line strategies

- Proximity Control
- Distraction
- Hurdle Help
- Antiseptic Bounce

# During: Next steps

- “Grandma’s Law”
- Emotional Labeling
- Watch YOUR language
- Managing other students for safety

# During: General Rule of Thumb

- When a child/youth is demonstrating aggressive behavior that is ***predominantly impulsive*** in nature, **decreasing the sensory stimulation** in the environment is generally helpful
- When a child/youth is demonstrating aggressive behavior that is ***predominantly perseverative*** in nature, **distracting the child as early as possible before the pattern escalates** is generally helpful

# After:

- ❑ Non-judgmental conversation
- ❑ Problem-solving
- ❑ Quiet
- ❑ Allow for “busy work”
- ❑ Re-join peers
- ❑ Communicate with parents

# How can parents help?

- ❑ Do share information with ministry team about techniques shown to help prevent/reduce aggression
- ❑ Do administer medication shown to help reduce frequency, severity of aggressive behavior during church activities (with approval of treating physician)
- ❑ Do be aware of the concern that aggressive behavior presents with largely untrained volunteers
- ❑ Do consider keeping your child home when he/she exhibits aggression that you can't successfully manage at home

# What if a child/youth presents too great a risk of severe aggression to attend church?

- ❑ Support the rest of the family in attending church, participating in discipleship activities
- ❑ Relational (home-based) respite
- ❑ Paid in-home child care/buddies with specialized training
- ❑ Scheduling church activities when child care available
- ❑ Whose responsibility is the child's spiritual development?
- ❑ Church as resource provider to parent?

# Conclusions:

- ❑ Kids with reactive aggression can generally be included in existing church programming
- ❑ Churches may reduce risk of aggression behavior by designing friendly ministry environments
- ❑ Providing teachers and group leaders adequate training to identify and intervene in potentially risky situations
- ❑ Ensure sufficient staffing at times of enhanced risk
- ❑ Traditional church may not be the “least restrictive environment” for some children/youth especially prone to aggressive behavior

**Provides FREE training,  
consultation, resources and  
support to help churches serve,  
welcome and include families of  
kids with hidden disabilities**

# Stay in Touch!

Key Ministry Website: <http://www.keyministry.org>

Church4EveryChild...Steve's Key Ministry Blog: <http://drgrcevich.wordpress.com>

Diving For Pearls...Katie Wetherbee's Blog: <http://katiewetherbee.wordpress.com>

A Reckless Pursuit...Harmony Hensley's Blog: <http://arecklesspursuit.wordpress.com>



<http://www.facebook.com/drgrcevich>

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Key-Ministry/116940088329098>



<http://twitter.com/#!/drgrcevich>

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# Questions?