



## Aggression

---

### Aggression:

Textbook defines it as '***behavior that is intended to harm another individual***'. However there are numerous examples of behaviors that exhibit aggression: murdering for money, verbally and physically assaulting someone, accidentally injuring someone, working persistently to sell a product, and many, many more. Almost every definition that psychologists have tried to come up with for 'aggression' can contradict a perfect example of something that is aggressive.

In psychology, as well as other social sciences, **Aggression refers to behavior between members of the same species that is intended to cause pain or harm.**

Aggression takes variety of forms among humans and can be:

- Physical (punching, biting, spitting)
- Verbal (insulting, harassment, or intimidation)
- Emotional (gas lighting, spreading rumors)
- Mental (berating someone)
- Assertiveness (which is used interchangeably among laypeople)

### Definition of Aggression:

1. **According to BERKOWITZ (1981)** when people define someone as aggressive; they might be saying that he frequently attempts to hurt others , or, that he is often unfriendly, or, in a quite different sense:
  - that he is typically very forceful and tries to get his own way in his dealings with others , or,
  - maybe that he assertively stands up for his beliefs , or
  - Perhaps that he usually attempts to solve the problems facing him.

It can be classified as a:

- Behavior
- Harm or Injury

2. **McGEE & Wilson (1984)**

- “Any behavior whose intent is to inflict harm or injury on another living being.”

### **3. Lefreancois (1982)**

- “Hostile or forceful action intended to dominate or violate.”

### **4. Atkinson, Atkinson & Hilgard (1983)**

- “Behavior that is intended to injure another person or to destroy property.”

### **5. Freeman (1982)**

- “Behavior intended to hurt another person.”

## **Types of Aggression**

- 1. Indirect Aggression:** Involves harming others in an indirect, non-physical way, often through social manipulation, such as spreading rumors or excluding someone from a group. This form is common in relational contexts, particularly among peers or in social settings where direct confrontation is avoided.
- 2. Direct Aggression:** Behavior intended to hurt someone “to his or her face” and characterized by overt actions aimed at causing physical or psychological harm to another person, such as hitting, yelling, or threatening. This type of aggression is often visible and can intensify quickly, resulting in immediate conflict. For example aggression in sports; a hockey player punches another player
- 3. Emotional Aggression:** Hurtful behavior that stems from angry feelings. Emotional aggression is harm inflicted for its own sake, to cause pain and often impulsive. For example: A child throws a temper tantrum after mom refuses to buy candy
- 4. Instrumental Aggression:** Hurting another to accomplish another (non-aggressive) goal. It is a harm inflicted as a means to some goal other than causing pain. The goals may include personal gain, attention, self-defense etc. Example: a bully who gains respect of his/her peers or a mother spanks a child to discourage him from repeating a tantrum.

Instrumental aggression is influenced by both immediate and long-term conditions that shape an individual’s likelihood of engaging in aggressive behaviors for personal gain.

- **In immediate situations,** the opportunity for significant rewards, such as financial gain or social status, may prompt individuals to act aggressively, especially when they perceive the risks of negative consequences as low. This perception can arise in environments where law enforcement is weak or where individuals believe they can evade detection.
- **Over the long term,** factors like poverty and other economic challenges can create a mindset in which aggression is viewed as a necessary strategy for survival. When legitimate pathways to resources are limited, individuals may see crime as the primary means of obtaining what they need, whether that’s money,

respect, or power. Additionally, **cultural norms** play a crucial role; in some communities, aggressive behavior may be valorized or considered an acceptable method for achieving one's goals. These societal attitudes can reinforce the belief that instrumental aggression is not only justified but also expected, further entrenching the cycle of aggression as a means to gain resources and respect.

### **Cultural Variation in Aggression:**

Cultural variation in aggression is significant, with notable differences observed across countries and communities. A study conducted in 2002 highlighted that nations such as the Russian Federation, Puerto Rico, Mexico, and Ukraine reported the highest murder rates, indicating a strong prevalence of violent behavior in these cultures. In contrast, the United States also ranked high on this list, while Canada showed comparatively low aggression levels. Within countries, subcultures can exhibit distinct patterns of aggression, often manifesting in conflicts based on factors such as age, race, gender, religion, social status, and wealth. For example, teenagers aged 14 to 24 were identified as being particularly involved in criminal activities, suggesting that youth culture may play a critical role in aggressive behaviors. Additionally, it was noted that Aboriginal peoples represented a disproportionately high percentage of those involved in crime, indicating a need to explore the socio-economic and historical contexts that contribute to these patterns. Overall, understanding aggression requires an analysis of both cultural norms and subcultural dynamics, which can profoundly influence behavior.

### **Gender Role in Aggression:**

Gender roles significantly influence patterns of aggression, with research consistently showing that men tend to be more violent than women across various cultures. While both genders experience similar levels of anger, women are generally less likely to express that anger through aggressive actions. It is crucial to recognize that most studies focusing on gender and aggression have predominantly examined physical aggression, often neglecting other forms. Boys typically exhibit overt aggression, often resorting to physical confrontations, which tend to be quick and resolved in a short timeframe. In contrast, girls are more inclined towards indirect or relational aggression, employing tactics such as gossip or social exclusion. This form of aggression can be more enduring, as highlighted by the observation of Britt Galen and Marion Underwood in 1997: "Boys may use their fists to fight, but at least it's over with quickly; girls use their tongues, and it goes on forever." This distinction illustrates how societal expectations and norms around gender can shape the expression of aggression, with boys and girls developing different strategies that align with their respective roles.

### **Aggression is both Innate and Learned**

Are we born aggressive or is aggressiveness

Learned through experience?

- Innate aggression: an inevitable, biological inclination to violence
- Learned aggression: aggression taught through experience and imitation

**a) Aggression is Innate:**

Freud and Lorenz argued that aggression is an innate, natural, and biological characteristic. Freud described his theory of the ‘death instinct’ as a being a method of escaping life by playing dead whereas the ‘life instinct’ is meant to preserve life and reproduce. Lorenz stated that the will to live and aggression are compatible in the fact that both are directed at securing the advantages necessary to survival and reproduction.

**b) Aggression is learned:**

When children are socially taught to be aggressive to get what they want, they tend to be aggressive adults. If it is learned at a young age that aggressive behavior has a positive result this method of obtaining such effects will continue (De Souza 2007). Rewards will increase violent behavior (a kid hits another and gets his candy) whereas negative results can stop aggressive and violent behavior.

Punishment is most effective when it is administered immediately after unwanted behavior occurs, is strong enough to stop the behavior, and is consistently fair. Punishment can also instigate retaliation however, and act as a model to imitate.

## **Factors Increasing Aggressive Behavior**

**1. Influences of Aggression:**

**a. Neural Influence:**

Neurological factors significantly contribute to aggressive behavior, particularly through the activation of specific regions in the brain, notably within the limbic system. Research has identified neural pathways in both animals and humans that facilitate aggression, suggesting that aggression has a biological basis.

When researchers stimulate certain areas of the brain associated with aggression, hostility tends to increase. Conversely, deactivation of these regions often leads to a decrease in aggressive responses. One crucial brain structure involved in this process is the prefrontal cortex, which functions as an “emergency brake” on deeper brain areas that regulate aggressive behaviors. This region helps moderate impulsive reactions, providing self-control and restraint in the face of provocation.

In an illustrative experiment, researchers placed an electrode in an aggression-inhibiting area of a dominant monkey's brain. A subordinate monkey learned to press a button to activate the electrode whenever the dominant monkey displayed intimidating behavior, effectively reducing its aggression. This highlights how neural mechanisms can be manipulated to influence aggressive dynamics in social hierarchies.

Additionally, aggression in humans has been similarly observed in controlled settings. For example, after receiving electrical stimulation in her amygdala—a core part of the brain that processes emotions—a woman exhibited extreme rage and smashed her guitar against the wall. This incident illustrates how direct manipulation of brain regions linked to aggression can lead to heightened emotional responses and aggressive actions.

This finding emphasizes the profound impact of neural influences on aggression, indicating that aggression is not solely a product of external circumstances or learned behavior but is also deeply rooted in the brain's biology. Understanding these neural mechanisms can provide insights into potential treatments for aggression-related disorders and inform strategies for managing aggressive behaviors.

### **b. Genetic Influence:**

Genetic factors play a significant role in shaping aggression by influencing the neural system's sensitivity to aggressive cues. Research indicates that heredity can contribute to aggressive tendencies, as evidenced by both animal studies and observations in humans and primates (Asher, 1987; Olweus, 1979).

For instance, certain animals can be selectively bred for aggressive traits, a practice commonly seen in activities like cockfighting. These selective breeding highlights how specific genetic traits related to aggression can be enhanced or diminished within populations. In humans, aggression varies not only due to environmental influences but also as a result of inherited temperamental traits that are influenced by the sympathetic nervous system, which governs our physiological responses to stress and aggression.

Psychologist Kirsti Lagerpetz (1979) conducted notable experiments using albino mice to explore genetic influences on aggression. She selectively bred the most aggressive mice together and did the same with the least aggressive ones. The offspring of the aggressive mice exhibited heightened aggression, while the progeny of the less aggressive mice displayed reduced aggression. This research underscores the potential heritability of aggressive traits, suggesting that genetic predispositions

can shape an individual's propensity for aggression, influencing their behavior from a young age.

Overall, these findings illustrate that genetics plays a crucial role in aggression, affecting not only individual behavior but also the evolutionary trajectories of species, where aggressive traits can be selectively reinforced or diminished over generations.

### **c. Blood Chemistry:**

The levels of various substances in the blood can reveal factors related to aggression, providing insights into how biology influences behavior. Two primary contributors linked to aggression are **testosterone** and **alcohol**:

- **Testosterone:** Research shows a strong correlation between the male sex hormone, testosterone, and aggressive behavior. Higher testosterone levels are often found in individuals convicted of unprovoked violent crimes compared to those convicted of non-violent crimes (Dabbs, 1992; Dabbs et al., 1995, 1998). Testosterone is thought to increase aggression by enhancing feelings of dominance, competitiveness, and risk-taking. While high testosterone doesn't cause aggression on its own, it can amplify aggressive responses, especially when combined with other factors like frustration or social provocation.
- **Alcohol:** Alcohol is another factor that can significantly influence aggression, particularly when individuals are provoked. Studies indicate that alcohol reduces self-control and impairs judgment, making people more prone to aggressive responses in situations where they might otherwise respond calmly (Bushman, 1993; Bushman & Cooper, 1990; Taylor & Chermack, 1993). Violent individuals are also more likely to consume alcohol and display heightened aggression when intoxicated (White et al., 1993). Alcohol's effects on aggression can be especially pronounced in social situations where tensions or provocations arise, leading to conflicts that might otherwise be avoided.

These findings suggest that blood chemistry, including hormone levels and substance use, can significantly influence aggression, with testosterone and alcohol acting as notable contributors to increased aggression in certain individuals and situations.

## **2. Psychological Influence:**

### **a) Frustration:**

The classic frustration-aggression theory, developed by Dollard and colleagues (1989) and later revised by Miller (1941), posits that frustration—anything that blocks the achievement of a goal—can lead to aggression. Frustration is more likely to trigger

aggressive behavior when individuals are highly motivated to reach a goal, when they expect success, and when their efforts are fully obstructed. According to this theory, frustration doesn't just cause aggression directly; it can also lead to displaced aggression (redirecting anger toward a less threatening target) or self-directed harm, like feelings of despair. This theory emphasizes how unmet expectations and blocked goals can foster aggressive tendencies.

**b) Rewards:**

**Operant Conditioning (B.F. Skinner) is another theory:**

B.F. Skinner's operant conditioning theory suggests that behaviors are influenced by their consequences. If an individual receives positive reinforcement after displaying aggression (such as winning a toy or receiving attention), they are more likely to repeat the behavior in the future to obtain similar rewards. This process reinforces aggression as an effective way to achieve desired outcomes. Therefore, behaviors that are rewarded, even unintentionally, may become ingrained, making aggression a learned response under certain conditions.

**c) Models:**

**Social Learning Theory/Observational Learning (Albert Bandura)**

Albert Bandura's social learning theory highlights that aggression can be learned by observing others. Through social modeling or observational learning, individuals may imitate aggressive behaviors they see in others, such as family members, peers, or even characters in media. Bandura (1979) argued that aggressive behaviors are often motivated by aversive experiences like frustration, pain, and insults, which people observe and then replicate. In environments where aggression is normalized or rewarded, individuals are more likely to adopt these behaviors. This theory emphasizes the influence of social environments and the importance of positive role models in shaping non-aggressive responses.

**3. Environmental Influence:**

**a) Painful incident:**

Experiencing physical pain can significantly increase aggressive tendencies. Research led by Leonard Berkowitz (1983, 1989, and 1999) and his associates demonstrated this connection through a simple yet revealing experiment: students were asked to submerge one hand in either lukewarm water or painfully cold water. Those who endured the cold water reported feeling more irritated and annoyed, and they also displayed a greater willingness to inflict discomfort on others by blasting them with unpleasant noise.

Berkowitz's findings challenged the prevailing belief that frustration alone triggers aggression, proposing instead that aversive stimulation—any experience of discomfort or pain—serves as the primary trigger for hostile aggression. In situations where individuals experience physical discomfort or distress, their tolerance for frustration decreases, making them more prone to aggressive responses. This insight has practical implications for settings like healthcare or high-stress environments, where understanding the influence of pain on behavior can guide more compassionate and proactive responses to reduce the likelihood of aggressive incidents.

**b) Heat:**

Heat is one of the most extensively studied environmental factors associated with aggression, with evidence suggesting that uncomfortable temperatures can significantly increase aggressive tendencies. In addition to other environmental irritants like offensive odors, cigarette smoke, and air pollution (Rotton & Frey, 1985), heat stands out as a powerful trigger.

William Griffit's (1970) research highlighted the effects of heat on emotions and behavior by comparing students in two different temperature settings. Students in an uncomfortably hot room reported more fatigue, irritability, and aggression than those in a room with a normal temperature, suggesting that heat can heighten feelings of hostility and discomfort. This finding has been supported by further studies, which show that people are more likely to retaliate or respond aggressively when they are overheated (Bell, 1980; Rule et al., 1987). These effects may be due to the physiological stress that high temperatures place on the body, leading individuals to feel more irritable and less tolerant of frustrating situations.

In broader societal contexts, these findings imply that during hot weather, people may have a heightened susceptibility to aggressive interactions, underlining the importance of addressing environmental comfort in shared spaces to mitigate unnecessary conflict.

**c) Attack:**

Being the target of an attack, whether physical or verbal, significantly increases the likelihood of an aggressive response. Experiments have shown that when people are intentionally insulted or harmed by others, they are much more likely to retaliate with similar hostility. This phenomenon, often referred to as "reciprocal aggression," highlights how perceived threats or attacks can trigger a defensive reaction, prompting individuals to respond in kind.

Intentional attacks create a sense of personal offense and perceived injustice, leading to anger and a desire for retribution. In this way, attacks don't just trigger an instinctual

response—they can escalate conflicts by initiating a cycle of retaliatory aggression. Recognizing this pattern is crucial for conflict resolution, as it underscores the importance of de-escalation and communication in preventing aggressive responses and breaking cycles of hostility.

**d) Crowding:**

Crowding, or the subjective experience of lacking personal space, is a significant factor that can heighten stress and, in turn, increase aggressive tendencies. When individuals feel confined, such as being packed into the back of a bus, stuck in heavy traffic, or living in cramped quarters with multiple roommates, their sense of personal control is reduced. This feeling of restricted freedom can amplify frustration and irritability, leading to more aggressive responses in otherwise manageable situations (Baron et al., 1976; McNeel, 1980).

Research on animals provides additional insight into the effects of overcrowding on aggression. Studies show that animals placed in densely populated spaces experience increased Stress levels, which can lead to aggressive behaviors as they compete for limited resources and territory. Calhoun's (1962) classic studies on rodents and similar findings by Christina and others (1960) highlighted how an environment's physical constraints can create social conflict, ultimately driving animals toward aggression. These findings suggest that crowding may trigger a similar response in humans, where the stress of confined living or social spaces can create a breeding ground for aggressive behaviors.

#### **4. Other Factors:**

There are some other factors that are the major cause of causing aggression in people and societies.

- Media
- Video games in children

Above two have a prominent impact on attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions of aggression, especially among younger populations.

- **Media:** The portrayal of violence and aggression in television, movies, and online platforms can shape individuals' perceptions of acceptable behavior. Frequent exposure to violent scenes or hostile interactions, whether fictional or real, can lead to desensitization—making people less sensitive to violence and more accepting of aggressive behavior as a method of conflict resolution. News media, particularly when sensationalizing violent events, can contribute to a culture of fear and hostility, influencing people's likelihood to respond aggressively when they feel threatened.
- **Video Games in Children:** Video games, especially those with violent content, have been scrutinized for their potential influence on children's behavior. Many studies

suggest that consistent exposure to aggressive themes in gaming can lead to increases in aggressive thoughts, emotions, and, in some cases, behaviors. The interactive nature of video games differs from passive media because it often requires players to enact aggressive behavior, which may reinforce aggressive responses in real-life situations. Additionally, excessive gaming can interfere with social skill development, leading to frustration and difficulty managing emotions, which can manifest as aggression.

These factors can influence both immediate responses and long-term attitudes toward aggression, making it essential to be aware of their potential effects, especially on younger, impressionable audiences.

### **Prevention and Control of Aggression**

While there is no definitive "cure" for aggression, several strategies can help prevent and manage aggressive behaviors, fostering a more peaceful and cooperative environment. Here are some key approaches:

- **Reducing Stressors:** Addressing common triggers of aggression, such as frustration, discomfort, and provocation, can help minimize aggressive responses. This may involve creating supportive environments where individuals feel empowered, reducing overcrowding in shared spaces, and providing access to resources that alleviate everyday stressors.
- **Promoting Healthy Living Conditions:** Ensuring that people have access to basic needs—like safe housing, quality healthcare, social support, and economic opportunities—can greatly reduce the frustration and desperation that sometimes lead to aggression. Improved economic conditions and supportive communities give individuals the stability and resilience needed to manage stress constructively.
- **Regulating Violent Media:** The government and other regulatory bodies can play a role in limiting exposure to violent media content, particularly forms of entertainment that demean and degrade others. By censoring or age-restricting such media, especially those targeting young audiences, society can reduce the likelihood of aggression by minimizing desensitization to violence.
- **Educational Workshops:** Workshops that teach conflict resolution, emotional regulation, and communication skills are effective tools for preventing aggression. By equipping individuals with techniques to manage their emotions and resolve disputes nonviolently, educational programs can foster self-awareness and empathy, helping individuals handle potential conflicts with more patience and understanding.

Together, these approaches aim to address both the internal and external factors that contribute to aggression, offering a more comprehensive strategy for prevention and control.

## How to reduce Aggression

Reducing aggression can involve strategies that allow individuals to release pent-up frustration constructively and reinforce positive behaviors through social learning. Here are effective approaches:

- **ABC of Model**

The ABC model of aggression provides a framework for understanding the factors that contribute to aggressive behavior.

- a. **A stands for Antecedent:** Antecedents are the events or triggers that precede an aggressive reaction. These can include frustrating situations, provocations, or environmental stressors that initiate aggressive thoughts or feelings. Understanding the antecedents is crucial for identifying what might provoke aggression in individuals. For example
- b. **B stands for Belief:** This refers to the beliefs or interpretations individuals hold regarding the antecedents they encounter. Beliefs shape how a person perceives a situation and influences their emotional responses. For example, if a person believes they are being unjustly provoked, they may feel justified in responding aggressively. These beliefs can be shaped by past experiences, social norms, or learned behaviors.
- c. **C stands for Consequence:** Consequences are the outcomes or reactions that follow an aggressive behavior. This can include both immediate effects, such as conflict escalation or social isolation, and longer-term impacts, such as legal repercussions or damaged relationships. Recognizing the consequences of aggression can help individuals understand the potential costs of their actions and encourage more constructive responses.

Overall, the ABC model highlights the interplay between triggers, beliefs, and outcomes in the context of aggression, providing a structured way to analyze and address aggressive behaviors. By examining each component, individuals can gain insights into their own behaviors and develop strategies for managing aggression more effectively. Example it with the help of example:

<i>Negative Belief</i>	<i>Positive Belief</i>
<b>Antecedent:</b> Imagine a driver, Ali, is cut off abruptly by another car while merging onto the highway. This unexpected action creates a sense of frustration and provocation.	<b>Antecedent:</b> In the same scenario, consider another driver, Salar, who also gets cut off by the same car while merging onto the highway.
<b>Belief:</b> Ali may interpret this incident as a personal affront, believing that the other driver acted recklessly and without regard for his safety. He thinks, "That driver is such an idiot! They don't care about anyone else on the road."	<b>Belief:</b> Instead of viewing the act as a personal attack, Salar interprets it differently. He thinks, "Maybe that driver didn't see me. Everyone makes mistakes."

<p><b>Consequence:</b> As a result of these beliefs, Ali experiences heightened anger and decides to tailgate the other driver. When the other car slows down, Ali honks aggressively and gestures rudely. This negative behavior escalates the situation, potentially leading to road rage, further conflict, or even an accident.</p>	<p><b>Consequence:</b> Responding to his belief, Salar takes a deep breath, maintains a safe distance, and adjusts his speed to avoid any confrontation. Instead of reacting aggressively, he remains calm and continues to drive safely. This positive behavior not only prevents escalation but also contributes to a more peaceful driving environment.</p>
---	--

In these examples, the ABC model illustrates how the same antecedent (being cut off in traffic) can lead to vastly different responses based on an individual's beliefs. Negative beliefs can fuel aggressive reactions, while positive interpretations can promote constructive behaviors. Understanding this model allows individuals to reflect on their reactions and consider how changing their beliefs about a triggering event could lead to more positive outcomes.

- **Catharsis:** Catharsis is the process of releasing, purging, or cleansing oneself of negative emotions, such as anger or frustration. According to psychologist Fritz Perls (1973), suppressing anger can intensify it, so finding safe, controlled ways to release these feelings can help. This "letting off steam" might involve engaging in physical activity, expressing emotions through creative outlets like art or writing, or discussing one's feelings with a supportive person. When individuals are given opportunities to safely express their frustrations, they are less likely to engage in aggressive behaviors later on.
- **Social Learning:** Social learning theory suggests that aggression can be reduced by reinforcing positive, cooperative behavior rather than focusing on or punishing aggression. Studies, such as the one by Hamblin and colleagues (1969), show that children become less aggressive when caregivers ignore their aggressive acts and instead reward their non-aggressive, cooperative actions. By modeling and encouraging prosocial behaviors, individuals, especially children, can learn to handle conflicts calmly and constructively. Reinforcing positive behaviors not only reduces aggression but also strengthens interpersonal skills and empathy, contributing to a more harmonious social environment.

Both of these methods aim to address the root of aggression—whether by providing a release for suppressed anger or by fostering a culture that rewards non-aggressive interactions, ultimately reducing the likelihood of aggressive behaviors.