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Aggressive Preschoolers Found To Have Fewer Friends Than Others

Preschoolers who are aggressive, angry, and inattentive tend to have fewer playmates than their non-aggressive classmates, whether they are boys or girls. In comparison, non-aggressive children do better at interactions with many peers over time.

Those are the findings of new research that used an important innovation for studying children's peer relationships. Conducted by researchers at Arizona State University and published in the July/August 2008 issue of the journal *Child Development*, the study suggests that as early as preschool, aggressive children have less consistent relationships with their peers.

Preschool is a time when there are a lot of changes in the ways children interact with their peers. Although aggressive behavior is common at this age, as children practice social skills and learn how to control their behavior, some children show more intense aggression or do so more often. These children may harm other children, be quick to anger, and have trouble focusing on activities. Because these children are at risk for later social and developmental problems, researchers feel it is important to understand their early relationships with peers.

The Arizona State University researchers observed 97 students in six preschool classrooms in an urban southwest area of the United States; the students' teachers also reported on the children's behavior. Using a new quantitative procedure called the Q-connectivity method, they repeatedly assessed the children's peer interactions to determine how many peers the children interacted with and how often those interactions took place. Using that information, they looked at the relationship between children's ability to establish and maintain relationships with peers and their tendency to display physical aggression, anger, and attention problems.

Aggressive, angry, and inattentive children tended to play with fewer peers repeatedly over time than their non-aggressive classmates, who were more successful at interacting frequently with many classmates over time. This pattern also was true of younger children, which is not surprising given the typical social development of younger children, who tend to move from solitary play to increased involvement with classmates. The findings were the same for boys as well as girls.

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Summarized from Child Development, Vol. 79, Issue 4, *The Breadth of Peer Relationships among Preschoolers: An Application of the Q-Connectivity Method to Externalizing Behavior* by Hanish, LD, Martin, CL, Fabes, RA, and Barcelo, H (Arizona State University). Copyright 2008 The Society for Research in Child Development, Inc. All rights reserved.