The *Making Choices* Program: Social Problem-Solving Skills for Children


Mark W. Fraser
James K. Nash
Maeda J. Galinsky
Kathleen M. Darwin

University of North Carolina
School of Social Work
Chapel Hill, NC 27599

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What Is Aggressive Behavior?

A persistent pattern of behavior that causes or threatens harm to other people.

- Violates the basic rights of others;
- Violates major age-appropriate societal norms or rules; or
- Causes impairment in social or academic functioning.
Elements of Aggressive Behavior

- Verbal – taunts, threats
- Physical – tantrums, throwing, fights
- Instrumental – goal directed
- Reactive – unplanned retaliation
- Proactive – bullying, provocation
- Overt – externalized
- Covert – lying, stealing, cheating, drug use
- Indirect or Relational – social manipulation
Why Focus on Aggressive Behavior?

Aggressive behavior in childhood:
➢ Often has lasting effects on social development;
➢ Is relatively stable for children who become aggressive at an early age;
➢ Is relatively stable across generations;
➢ Consumes a disproportionate share of resources; and
➢ (If untreated,) Has a poor prognosis. It is a major precursor of violent behavior.
Where to Start?  Ecological Perspective

Individual Factors

School Factors

Conduct Problems

Peer Factors

Family Factors

Neighborhood and Societal Factors

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Cascades of Risk: No Single Pathway

Pre-School
- Biological Risks
- Parenting
- Family-School
- Pre-School Climate
- Neighborhood

School Entry
- School Readiness
- Processing Skills
- Parenting
- Family-School
- School Climate
- Neighborhood

Elementary School
- Peer Rejection
- Academic Failure
- Parenting
- Family-School
- School Climate
- Neighborhood

Increasingly Broad Repertoire of Potentially Damaging and Aggressive Behaviors

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Intervention Model for Working with Conduct Problems in Childhood

“The guide is reader friendly…[and]…use of contemporary references--including entertainers, sports figures, video games--helps this text achieve its basic purpose: to get kids to stop and think before acting”

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Making Choices: A Social Development Program

Developing culturally relevant resources for practitioners, teachers, and others

- Focus on **proximal** outcomes as indicators of distal outcomes
- Constant re-invention and refinement
- Fidelity-focused delivery
  - Community involvement
  - Research-based, highly specified manuals
  - Clinical support
Focus on Relational Factors: Interrupt Early Start Risk Process

- Rejection by prosocial peers
- Poor relationships with teachers
- Few opportunities for prosocial involvement
- Association with rejected peers

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How to Strengthen Prosocial Relationships?

With teachers…

It wasn’t me…

With peers…

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The Relational Risk Chain

Coupled – perhaps – with high biological risk (e.g. low social conditionability and low behavioral inhibition), child has early exposure to violence, abuse, neglect, and coercion

Child imitates aversive behavior and earns attention with aversive behavior

Stressed, busy parents (or parents impaired by drug use) acquiesce and the child’s aversive behaviors are rewarded/accelerated

Peers and teachers begin to reject child
The Relational Risk Chain (cont.)

- Child outcomes include: lower cooperative participation, school liking, and achievement; higher inattention, hostile attribution, and misconduct
- Rejection and withdrawal lead to limited prosocial opportunities; increased opportunities for drug use, exposure to alternative values and beliefs
Making Choices: Solving Social Problems

- Social information processing skills
- Emotion regulation (understanding feelings, arousal; self-talk and other techniques to control impulsive behavior)
- Opportunities for involvement with prosocial peers
The Problem-Solving Sequence:
Integrating SIP with Emotion Regulation

- State the problem
- Evaluate potential solutions
- Select & enact the best solution(s)
- Assess outcomes
- Interpret social cues
- Encode social cues

Arousal, Emotions, Social Knowledge

Set goal(s)
Generate potential solutions
Making Choices Program
Skills for Solving Social Problems
Making Choices

- Learning with and from peers -- FUN
- Having students generate examples and ideas for role play activities
- Learning entire sequence of skills
- Reviewing material and practicing skills from earlier lessons
- Tailoring content
Making Choices Program: Basic Elements

- **Mixed** group or classroom format
- Guided group or classroom process
- Social learning model
  - Teaching skills
  - Supervised practice
  - In vivo replication
- 7 Units, 29 lessons (approx. 1 hr/week for academic year)
Unit 3: INTERPRETATION

Lesson 1: Recognizing Others’ Intentions
Lesson 2: Distinguishing Friendly versus Hostile Intentions
Lesson 3: Distinguishing Intentional versus Unintentional Behavior
Lesson 4: Situations, Meanings, and Problems
Sample Lesson 3: Distinguishing Intentional versus Unintentional Behavior

• 13th lesson of series
• Content already covered includes
  – recognizing and identifying emotions and feelings
  – managing feelings
  – self talk
  – identifying social cues
  – distinguishing friendly vs hostile intentions
Distinguishing Intentional versus Unintentional Behavior

• Goals: improve ability to use situational cues to distinguish intentional from unintentional behavior, and improve ability to encode a larger number of situational cues

• First step: review and remind of content covered in prior lessons, with emphasis on ways to distinguish friendly from hostile intention
Distinguishing Intentional versus Unintentional Behavior

• Activities: 1. Discussion
  – “Why is it important to be able to identify intentional or unintentional behavior?”
  – Ensure that students discuss
    • helps one understand the situation better
    • helps one decide what to do next
  – Emphasize that unintentional actions are usually not hostile
Distinguishing Intentional versus Unintentional Behavior

• Activities: 2. Detective Game
  – Purpose: to help students learn how to pay attention to all the clues in a situation and consider them before making a decision
  – Tasks:
    • Leader reads a simple story where character has unclear motivation (e.g. John is standing next to Tom’s broken bike)
Distinguishing Intentional versus Unintentional Behavior

• Tasks (continued)
  • Leader reads follow up facts one by one (e.g. John’s bike is on the ground, broken; John has a scraped knee and elbow). Facts can be relevant or irrelevant.
  • Students each place a card face down that says “By Accident”, “On Purpose to be Mean”, “On Purpose to be Friendly”, or “Can’t Tell” when they have made a decision.
  • Students cannot change their card once they have made their decision.
Distinguishing Intentional versus Unintentional Behavior

• Activities: 3. Discussion
  – After game is over, points to emphasize include
    • it’s important to pay attention to lots/all the clues
    • some clues are more important than others
    • there are different kinds of clues
    • deciding too quickly can lead to mistakes
    • figuring out others intentions can help us decide what to do next
Final Activity

- Using the theory and principles behind *Making Choices*, develop another lesson activity to teach the skill of distinguishing intentional versus unintentional behavior.
- How might you need to vary this for children of different ages or with cultural differences?
- Demonstrate/role play the lesson
- Feedback


