

Critical Elements in the Treatment of Aggressive School-Age Boys

Jim Larson, Ph.D.
School Psychology Program
Department of Psychology
University of Wisconsin – Whitewater
Whitewater, WI 53190
larsonj@uww.edu

and

The Melissa Institute for Violence Prevention
and Treatment
6250 Sunset Drive, Suite 204, Miami, FL 33143

Aggressive Patterns in School-Age Youth

□ Proactive Aggression

- goal-oriented aggressive behaviors
- unprovoked intentions to harm or coerce others
- cool-headed, bully-type
- Higher peer status
- overvalued use of aggression
- underestimates of victim impact



Aggressive Patterns in School-Age Youth

□ Reactive Aggression

- hypervigilant for aggressive cues
- biased interpretation of ambiguous cues
 - Hostile attributional bias
- narrow solution generation ability
- predominance of anger-arousing cognitive scripts
- Lower peer status
- High disciplinary contacts



Aggressive Patterns in School-Age Youth

- Most have elements of both patterns
 - Treatment implications vary based upon observed predominance of one or the other
 - Assessment
 - Functional Behavioral Assessment
 - Anger Self-Report Measures (e.g., Multidimensional Sch. Anger Inv.; ChIA)
 - School Discipline Records
 - Teacher/Parent Screening Scale
-

Teacher and Parent Screening Scale (Sample Items)

Never

Almost Always

1

2

3

4

5

When teased, fights back*

Blames others in fights*

Overreacts angrily to accidents*

Uses physical force to dominate**

Gets others to gang up on a peer**

Threatens and bullies others**

*Reactive **Proactive

Treatment Implications

Predominantly **Proactive** Aggression

- ❑ Frequently hard to treat due to lack of personal discomfort
 - ❑ Increase security/supervision
 - ❑ Train alternative conflict resolution
 - ❑ Use mini-challenges and behavioral contracts
 - ❑ Assist parents with monitoring skills
-

Treatment Implications

Predominantly **Reactive** Aggression

Essential Components for Group Treatment

- ❑ Anger management training for generalization
 - ❑ Attribution re-training for generalization
 - ❑ Social problem-solving training for generalization
 - ❑ Behavioral skills training for generalization
-

What is meant by TRAINING?

It is one thing to **know about** a skill, but quite another to **engage** the skill in fast moving moments of stress, ambiguity, and potential danger



What is meant by GENERALIZATION?

- Can the youth enact the skill:
 - Across settings?
 - Across individuals?
 - Across multiple trigger events?

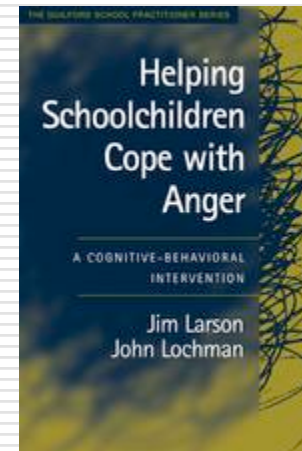
...and can it be maintained over time?

Implications for Training and Generalization

- Know the components of the skill
 - E.g., internal and environmental cues
 - Teach, model, rehearse, feedback
 - New situation, new location, new people
 - Gather multiple collaborators
 - Teachers, family, PO's...
 - Get in for the Long Haul
 - Nothing happens in six weeks...
-

Anger Coping Program

- ❑ Group anger and aggression management for boys 8-13
- ❑ Solid research foundation by Lochman and others
- ❑ 18 sessions plus booster

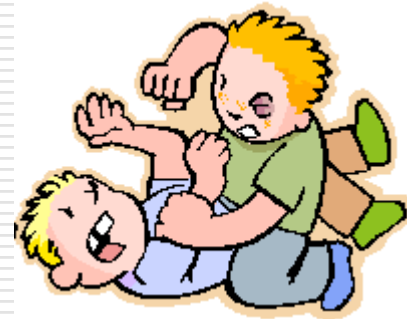


Anger Coping Program

- **Multiple-gating** process of identification
 - Teacher Nomination
 - Teacher/Parent Screening Scale
 - Broadband Rating Scale
 - **Highly collaborative** with classroom teacher (or unit staff or motivated parent)
 - Generalization Training Form
-

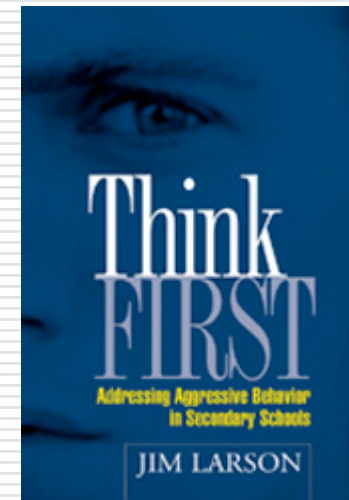
Anger Coping Program Training Foci

- Affective Education
- Goal Setting
- Perspective Taking
- Cue Recognition
- Anger Regulation
- Social Problem-Solving



Think First

- ❑ Group anger and aggression management for adolescents
- ❑ Research is emerging and promising
- ❑ 18 weeks plus boosters
- ❑ School focus, linked to disciplinary structure

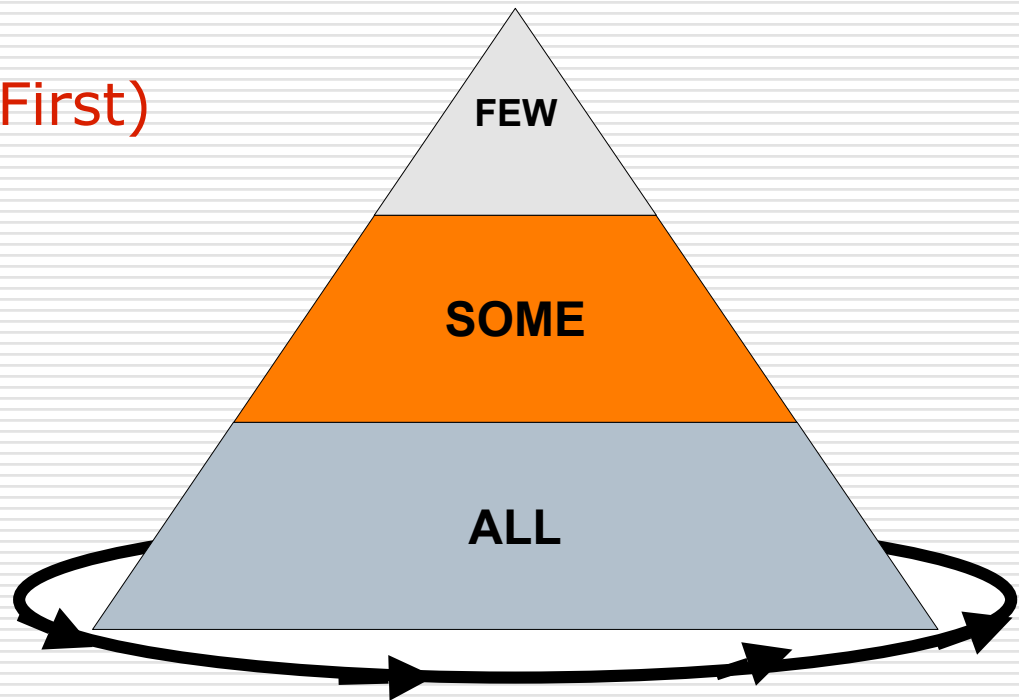


Three Levels of Social and Emotional Support in School

TERTIARY (Think First)

SECONDARY

PRIMARY



Think First

- Identification linked to response to research-supported interventions
 - Are effective universal and selected prevention supports in place?
 - Has the behavior of concern been identified (e.g., reactive physical aggression)?
 - What do the monitoring data say?
 - What is the history?
-

Think First

- ❑ Collaborative orientation
 - ❑ Linkage to classroom
 - ❑ Training functional vocabulary
 - ❑ Emphasis on generalization
 - ❑ Ongoing progress monitoring
 - Authentic permanent product data
 - Hassle Log self-monitoring
 - Classroom Progress Monitoring Form
-

Classroom Progress Monitoring Form

Above Class Average	At	Below	Well Below Class Av.
4	3	2	1

- Adherence to Classroom Rules and Procedures
 - Vocal Disruptive Behavior
 - Self-Control of Anger
 - Homework Returned
 - In-Class Assignment Effort
-

Think First

- Five Training Modules (see Handout)
 - Knowledge Level
 - Skill Level
 - Built-in assessment strategies trigger advancement in training
 - Treatment length mediated by observed skill acquisition and progress monitoring data
-

Think First

Skill Areas

- Anger cue recognition
 - Palliative anger regulation
 - Self-instruction in anger regulation
 - Problem definition
 - Problem response generation
 - Problem response enactment
-

Think First

Session Structure

- ❑ Reinforce attendance;
 - ❑ Assign points for classroom self-monitoring/Teacher Reports
 - ❑ Fill-out a hassle log on an event that occurred since the previous meeting;
 - ❑ Through active role-play, address one or more of the most salient hassle log issues, practicing new knowledge and skills,
 - ❑ Review knowledge and skills from previous meetings;
 - ❑ Introduce new training;
 - ❑ Assign homework or challenge tasks;
 - ❑ Close with snack reinforcer and relaxation exercise
-

Think First

Final Thoughts

- Difficult population
 - Expect and plan for crises
 - Clear your calendar for the year
 - Let the data speak!
 - Plan for ongoing support
 - Use your “successes” as consultants
 - Feel good about yourself...
-