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Do aggressive children reconcile?

M.M.Kempes. Developmental psychology & Behavioural Biology, Utrecht University, The Netherlands

E.H.M.Sterck. Behavioural Biology, Utrecht University, The Netherlands

B.Orobio de Castro. Developmental psychology, Utrecht University, The Netherlands

Highly aggressive children can exhibit two types of aggression: proactive and reactive aggression. Proactive aggression is aimed at fulfilling goals, while reactive aggression occurs in reaction to (perceived) threats. Although the two types of aggression correlate in children, each type is associated with specific precursors, correlates, prognoses, and probable causal mechanisms. In children, a high rate of aggressive behavior is the reason most often cited for social rejection in peers. However, not all children showing high rates of aggression encounter rejection. Recent evidence suggests that social rejection is related to the specific subtype of aggression that is displayed. Specifically, reactive aggression was found to be related to rejection whereas proactive aggression was not. Differences in social acceptance of aggression may be influenced by affiliative behavior after a conflict, also called reconciliation. Reconciliation allows both primates and children to stave off the disruptive effects of aggression, probably allowing former opponents to remain in the same group. So far, little research has been done in children with aggressive behaviour problems. In the study presented here, we investigated the relation between reactive aggression, proactive aggression and reconciliation in both highly aggressive and normal children. We presented children in dyads with competitive games manipulated to provoke either reactive or proactive aggression. Strategies of reconciliation and de-escalation were observed. Our results will indicate whether and how different subtypes of aggression are related to reconciliation. In addition, we will relate this results to the sociometric status of the boys in their classroom.

Communicating author:

M.M.Kempes, e-mail: M.Kempes@fss.uu.nl