

Attribution of responsibility and social problem-solving in aggressive children.

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The present study aims to verify if there are differences in aggressive and non-aggressive children's cognitive ability in codifying social situations within two different contexts: family and school. Whatever, the research wants to analyze children's judgement on provoked or not provoked conflict events, and to verify the influence of age and rate of aggressive behavior.

64 subjects 7/8 and 10/11 aged, with high and low rate of aggression, were selected by peers nominations: each child was asked to indicate either the classmates that were aggressive for four weeks, and the frequency and type of these episodes.

The subjects were asked to evaluate verbal and physical aggressive acts described in 12 short stories.

Aggressive episodes between peers and between adults and children were explored in two different contexts: family and school. Same questions follow each story to verify: a) Evaluation of the act (Was the act right ? Why ?); b) Relationship between provocation and retribution (Who did you make the bigger mistake ? Why ?); c) Recognition and evaluation of a rule (Was a rule broken ? If so, which rule ?); d) Aggressive responses to conflict events (What would you have done in the place of ...?). Even the youngest children and the most aggressive ones were able to understand social rules.

The setting in which the interaction takes place seems to have influenced the subjects' evaluation, but older aggressive children justify adult aggressive behaviours more frequently, especially in the family setting. They perceive provocation cues in a different way compared to non-aggressive children.

The results suggest the importance of carrying out a more specific social-cognitive assessment in order to evaluate children's behavioural performances.

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