



EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH CONNECTION

MOVING LIVES FORWARD

I AM NOT MEAN, I AM MAD

Have you ever really thought about what the meaning or even why a child is aggressive? All too often we begin to say, "Don't play with that kid; he is mean." Or, "Stay away from her; she is mean." Truly have you ever really thought that we throw around the term 'mean' to describe someone who can get aggressive. Mean really is not an emotion or feeling. If you look up the word 'mean' you get a general explanation: "A mean person is someone who is unkind or cruel with the intention to put others down and make them fail."

Needless to say, young children do not have the developmental ability to "intend someone else to fail." Yes, children can be unkind, but being "cruel" is much more an adult behavior or one that adolescents have learned from their environment or experiencing this behavior in their worlds. When you see the definition of mean you see that it really does not even say anything about emotions or actions, just about one's view of another person. Mean as an adjective can describe a person as stingy or ungenerous, and it also can be acting in unkind ways. So, when young children hit, throw things, yell or lash out in other ways then are they 'being mean' they are facing a developmental challenge that is part of development. Yes, that is what it is; aggression is a child trying to make sense of big feelings, big situations, scary things and concept/ideas. Children do not know how to handle some situations and feelings; expression of oneself is no exception. This is yet another area where caregivers have to step up and teach children how to respond and react to these variety of situations that arise.

Ways that we can help children is to help them find the words to use. Label how they are feeling and give them ideas what they can do. Example is, "I understand you are angry about _____. You cannot throw things, but you can go outside and throw a ball, punch a pillow or blow

some bubbles. You cannot hit your brother because he frustrated you by _____. You can play something else. I can set a timer for you to have a turn or I will do a puzzle with you." . This allows them to see they are validated in their feelings, but what is not accepted and ways they can react. Also, you need to make sure that they do not hear so much adult topics and situations. Try and keep the adult conversation away from little ears and even bigger imaginations that little ones have. If they do hear something, explain in simple terms; try and reassure them that it is not for them to be concerned about. Allow them to ask questions, but answer simply with a very limited explanation. Less is more when it comes to children understanding complex subjects.

Aggression is a reaction that children have and it is not intentional or meant to be anything other than them trying to make sense of the world around them. Some children have bigger worries while others just have more of an emotional response to things. Both are normal and both require our patience and understanding. No child is 'mean' intentionally, but when they are displaying negative behavior, they need our guidance. Calling them mean leads to self-esteem issues that have long term effects. We need to teach, model and talk through their negative feelings even when difficult. These feelings should never be labeled, only redirected. Care shown during these difficult times can be challenging, but appropriate adult response can help make this stage of childhood stable and nurturing. This adult response will help children learn to be kinder and less aggressive.

Quote of the Week

"Respond to your children with love in their worst moments, their broken moments, their selfish moments because it is in their most unlovable human moments that they need to feel love."

Unknown

MEET CENTENNIAL'S EARLY CHILDHOOD CONSULTATION TEAM



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Covers the following
counties:
Logan, Morgan

LAUNCHING ZOOM SECURE TELEHEALTH SERVICES!

Our ECMH team is excited to announce that consultation services are now available using Zoom Secure Telehealth Services. These services are available to client families, schools, childcare centers and community partners with group and individual meetings available. All services will be provided using this private, secure video platform, and can be accessed using most electronic devices. For more information or to set up a consultation appointment, please contact our ECMH team or your local Centennial Mental Health Center office.



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Morgan, Washington
& Yuma

For additional support during
the COVID-19 Pandemic you
can call Centennial's
**COMMUNITY
SUPPORT LINE**

You can do this by calling your
nearest Centennial office:

Akron - 970.345.2254

Burlington - 719.346.8183

Cheyenne Wells - 719.346.8183

Elizabeth - 303.646.4519

Fort Morgan - 970.867.4924

Holyoke - 970.854.2114

Julesburg - 970.474.3769

Limon - 719.775.2313

Sterling - 970.522.4392

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Cheyenne, Elbert, Kit Carson,
Lincoln & Yuma

Contact your local Centennial Mental Health Center for assistance with any Early Childhood need.

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