

Aggressive Behaviour in Angelman Syndrome

Aggressive behaviour refers to any behaviour that has the potential to cause injury to another person. When we use the phrases ‘aggression’ or ‘aggressive behaviour’, we do not mean to imply that an individual with Angelman syndrome is intentionally trying to hurt another person.

Aggressive behaviour in Angelman syndrome

There have been reports for many years of aggressive behaviour in Angelman syndrome.

What is the prevalence of aggressive behaviour in Angelman syndrome?

A recent questionnaire study found that around 7 out of 10 individuals with Angelman syndrome showed aggressive behaviour. This research also revealed that an individual with Angelman syndrome is over three times more likely to display aggressive behaviour compared to individuals of the same age, gender and degree of disability who does not have the syndrome. We also found that individuals who displayed aggressive behaviour were more likely to score highly on a measure of [impulsivity and overactivity](#).

What are the forms of aggressive behaviour in Angelman syndrome?

Common forms of aggression seen in Angelman syndrome seem to be hair pulling and grabbing, although many other forms may occur such as hitting, kicking, scratching and biting. An example of aggressive behaviour in Angelman syndrome can be seen in the clip in the box above.

When is aggressive behaviour most likely to occur?

A recent study shows that aggressive behaviour in Angelman syndrome is more likely to occur when levels of adult attention are low. This may suggest that individuals are engaging in the behaviour to reinstate attention that they find rewarding or enjoyable. Interestingly, individuals in the study were also more likely to display aggressive behaviour when levels of adult contact were high (i.e. during one-to-one interaction). We think that aggression seen at these times may serve to maintain social contact.

Physical aggression/irritability has also been shown to increase in adulthood (Larson et al. 2015)

There are also, of course many other reasons why an individual might show aggressive behaviour and these are outlined in the following pages.

Do individuals intend to cause harm when they show aggressive behaviour?

Many parents and carers will report that aggressive behaviour is not malicious in any way and the individual has no intent to harm anyone else. Although as researchers we will often use the terms 'aggression' and 'aggressive behaviour' we do not mean that the person has any intent to harm anyone else. We simply use these terms to describe any behaviour that has the potential to hurt or injure others.

NEXT: Risk markers for behaviours that challenge