

# Nipping violence in the bud in children

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Annie knocks Melissa to the floor to get her doll. Alexis screams at the kid who grabbed his toy truck. Every day, in daycares across Quebec, similar scenes are witnessed by early childhood educators who try to foster calm by encouraging kids to express their anger and frustration in more constructive ways.

"It's really important to intervene early – before violent behaviour is too ingrained," says Jacinthe Guèvremont, who has started a program at the Université de Montréal daycare that aims to prevent developmental problems. "Violent behavioural problems that persist in early childhood are good indicators of school drop-outs and future delinquency."

But the interim director of the daycare warns against labeling kids between the ages of four and five as aggressive or problematic children. "Giving a child a reputation as trouble-maker risks making him feel like that the rest of his life and unable to see himself as anything else."

The program she's introduced at the daycare consists of a series of observation sessions of children that incorporate personalized strategies and approaches for helping those with behavioral difficulties. "This has to be done as soon as the child is in daycare," says Guèvremont. "Once children enter school it's often too late. They get labeled very quickly."

Guèvremont, who has worked with young children for close to 20 years, says behavioural problems aren't always the result of violent tendencies: "Sometimes, we wrongly believe the child has behavioural problems, when in fact he or she suffers from other things, such as sensorial

hypersensitivity."

Such children, she says, can't stand to be touched. Others are very sensitive about the texture of food in their mouths or noise. After a couple of observation sessions, Guèvremont will suggest, for example, that a sensitive child sit at the head of the table during lunch, which can provide extra space and limit contact with others that could upset him.

For other children, they simply have to be briefed on what awaits them in any given day, so they aren't upset by surprises. Daycare workers, Guèvremont points out, are very experienced and know how to manage a group. Yet solving problems among 15 children can be difficult.

"If children are raised in surroundings where they are supported, they learn to control their aggression and emotions and can become very sociable," Guèvremont says.

Source: University of Montreal

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