

Aggressive child? Systemic solution to problem behaviour

Hergenhan, A. (2015) Agresivní dítě? Systemické řešení problémového chování

Reviewed by Tereza Houšková

Aggression is one of the common human qualities, which from time to time manifests in everybody. But what if aggression is uncontrollably frequent and is a learned defence mechanism of situation management? A German psychologist and therapist Anton Hergenhan has analysed the issue of child aggression for over 20 years, and thanks to his psychotherapeutic background in systemic psychotherapy comes with progressive ideas concerning possible solutions.

The book is divided into ten chapters, some of which are theoretical and accurately describe the exact systemic-oriented special education thought process in addressing specific situations. In one of the chapters the author describes the symptom as a motive for therapy. The author aptly explains why it is very important to find what is good about each symptom and to be able to transform every problem into an object of further client development. In the following chapters, specific situations are presented as short case reports. These case reports point to each, even the slightest phenomenon that occurs during a conversation with a client. Anton Hergenhan emphasises the words that the participants use in the situations, and places them in the context of their internal perception of reality. He does not refrain from using and repeating swear words that children use in expressing aggression towards other children. On the contrary, the author describes these situations as follows: *"I believe that our children are the seismographs of the communication climate of the world of adults and the world of the media. They are a reflection of how the world works, how people think, how they speak, and what they consider important."*

Also for this reason the book encourages teachers not to avoid swear words. The author claims that the teacher should be able to explain the word and through a discussion make clear to the child why it is inappropriate to use these words and the problems that they can cause in their relationships. It is enriching to read case reports that do not try to avoid the most difficult situations that occur in groups of children.

These mainly include swear words, offensive language, or physical aggression. The book presents all possible strategies and perspectives concerning these phenomena.

The case reports published in this book made me curious as a reader as to how the situations will end up, and mercilessly made me think about my own competence to address similar situations. But I am not negative about this fact; on the contrary, I consider it very beneficial for every teacher who wants to improve one's professional competences. The text includes a number of scientific articles on the issue and references to relevant publications.

The book is written in a scientific but comprehensible style and is accessible to all professionals in special education, psychology, or psychotherapy. In this I see a minor disadvantage of the publication. I dare say that the book could seem relatively inaccessible to the parents of aggressive children who lack relevant professional background.

Hergenhan very aptly added the question mark in the title "Aggressive child?" Thanks to the author's systemic guideline, teachers can reveal the mystery of interviews that have the potential to eliminate children's aggression in a suitable way.

In conclusion, I would like to use the author's words that describe the immense potential of the interview as a tool for change: *"Our children show that they are really able to give up both verbal and physical aggressions. Whether you dear readers believe it or not: Ever since we have used the above described systemic approach in our institution, swear words or fights are no longer a means reaching an agreement. Understandably, in exceptional cases relapses do occur. However, the children themselves are usually able to cope with them."*

Mgr. Tereza Houšková
Institute of Special Education Studies
Faculty of Education
Palacký University Olomouc
Žižkovo nám. 5
771 40 Olomouc
Czech Republic
e-mail: houskovat@seznam.cz