



Chapter 1

Introduction

You can make a difference

Isabella, age seven, doesn't like the drawing she has made of her house. She rips up her paper and throws the pieces at the girl seated in class beside her.

Eleven-year-olds Dylan and Jamal skate off the ice at the end of a peewee hockey game. Dylan gives Jamal a shove, blaming him for missing a goal and causing their team to lose.

Jealous of Sarah's midnight curfew, 14-year-old Maria turns on her friend, spreading rumours that Sarah is sleeping with another girl's boyfriend.

Sixteen-year-old James purposely brushes his hand across the breast of a schoolmate as she passes him in a crowded hallway.

If you work or volunteer with young people, you've probably seen situations similar to those mentioned on the previous page. Though the incidents are very different, all of them involve aggressive behaviour.

Do you know how to respond effectively when a young person behaves aggressively? Do you know what kinds of aggression are considered normal for a young person's age and stage of development? Do you know what kinds of aggression may suggest that a young person has a problem that needs specialized intervention?

The aim of this book is to help you answer "yes" to these questions. It describes the causes of aggressive behaviour in young people, and discusses approaches to handling it. Specifically, the book:

- explains various types of aggressive behaviour exhibited by young people
- identifies factors related to aggressive behaviour
- distinguishes between normal aggression and aggression that is of greater concern in young people
- gives practical advice on how to address aggression in children and youth
- highlights prevention and intervention strategies that have been proven through research to be effective, and indicates strategies that should be avoided
- discusses assessment and diagnoses for more serious aggressive behaviour exhibited by young people.

Interspersed throughout the book, you will find case studies that illustrate how treatments have benefited young people of various ages who have shown problems with aggression.

In the past, you may have found it hard to manage aggressive behaviour in a young person. You may have felt frustrated, impatient or angry, and may have raised your voice or spoken harsh words. This book will help you understand that young people who behave aggressively are not bad or deserving of blame. They need to know that you care about them and that you are willing to help them solve their problems. The earlier a child with aggression problems is identified and treated, the greater the chance that the chosen treatment will have lasting benefits.

A note on culture and aggression

Many of us, quite naturally, react to people and situations based on experiences and perspectives that are rooted in our own culture. Most of the information on aggression in this book is based on research rooted in western ideas and values. North American society, however, is becoming more and more culturally diverse. Experts recognize that family background, culture and religion can influence all types of behaviour—including aggression. What might be considered unusual or

problematic behaviour in one culture may be seen as normal and acceptable in another.

Therefore, if you work or volunteer with young people, you will find it valuable to become more aware of your own attitudes and theirs. Ask yourself questions about what experiences from your past, in particular your cultural upbringing, have influenced you to develop certain views. Think about whose ideas have influenced your own, and where those ideas may have come from. Consider taking steps to learn about the cultures of the young people with whom you are involved.

A note on the language used in this book

Young people includes children (ages zero to 11) and youth (ages 12 to 18). We sometimes discuss these groups separately because the behaviours of each are different.

Parents includes parents, guardians, foster parents, group home workers or any other people (such as grandparents, aunts and uncles) who raise young people full time.

Caregivers includes nannies, babysitters and others who help parents look after their children.