





# Aggression (Severe) in Children under Age 6

<b>Level 0</b>	Comprehensive diagnostic assessments. Refer to Principles of Practice on page 3. Evaluate and treat comorbid conditions (i.e. medical, other psychiatric conditions).
	<p><b>Level 1</b></p> <p>Psychosocial intervention.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Evidence-based psychotherapeutic interventions such as Parent Management Training (PMT) or Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT) are the first-line treatment for 3 to 6 months.</li> <li>◆ Behavioral therapy contingency management</li> <li>◆ Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA therapy) for youth with Autism Spectrum and/or developmental disabilities.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Level 2</b></p> <p>Initial medication treatment should target the primary disorder(s) (when available, follow evidence-based guidelines for primary disorder).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Optimize treatment of primary disorder first before addressing aggression with other pharmacologic agents.</li> <li>◆ Treat comorbid ADHD per guidelines. Refer to page 13.</li> <li>◆ Treat comorbid Anxiety Disorders per guidelines. Refer to page 32.</li> <li>◆ Treat comorbid Mood Disorders per guidelines. Refer to page 49 for Major Depressive Disorder.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Level 3</b></p> <p>In the absence of co-morbid ADHD and presence of severe impairment, severe aggression, or failure of psychosocial treatment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Monotherapy with methylphenidate formulation, then amphetamine formulation or low dose alpha-2 agonist.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Level 4</b></p> <p>If failure to respond to Level 2 and/or 3, or insufficient response consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Low dose risperidone, aripiprazole.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◇ Discontinuation trial after 6 months of any effective medication treatment.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>Not Recommended:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Use of medication without a trial of concurrent psychosocial treatment.</li> </ul>	

# Aggression (Chronic, Impulsive) in Children and Adolescents Ages 6 to 17 Years Old

## Level 0

Comprehensive diagnostic assessment. Refer to *Principles of Practice* on page 6. Evaluate and treat comorbid conditions (i.e. medical, other psychiatric conditions).

- ◆ Consider screening tools for general psychopathology
  - ◇ Ages 3 to 21 years old: Child /Adolescent Psychiatry Screen (CAPS)
  - ◇ Ages 4 to 17 years old: Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) for parents and teachers
  - ◇ Ages 11 to 17 years old: Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) for youth self-report

Links to screening tools available at <https://floridabhcenter.org/>.

- ◆ Assessing treatment effects and outcomes with standardized measures is highly encouraged.
  - ◇ Modified Overt Aggression Scale (MOAS)
  - ◇ Affective Reactivity Index (ARI)
  - ◇ Emotion Dysregulation Inventory (EDI)
  - ◇ Emotional Outburst Inventory (EMO-I)

Links to screening tools available at <https://floridabhcenter.org/>.





- ◆ When acute aggression is present, conduct a risk assessment and, if necessary, consider referral to a psychiatrist or an emergency department for evaluation.
- ◆ Assess function of behavior to identify factors that trigger and/or reinforce the behaviors.
- ◆ Obtain additional collateral information as needed and obtain a relevant medical workup, physical examination, and nutritional status evaluation.
- ◆ Provide psychoeducation for patients and families.
- ◆ Develop an appropriate treatment plan with the patient/family and obtain buy-in.
- ◆ Help the family establish community supports.



## Level 1

Engage the child and family in taking an active role in implementing psychosocial strategies and help them to maintain consistency with psychosocial, psychoeducational, and other evidence-based treatments interventions:

- ◆ Parent Management Training (PMT), Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT), behavioral therapies such as ABA therapy, behavioral modification, and contingency management
- ◆ Multimodal community interventions: Multisystemic therapy
- ◆ Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (Trauma-focused CBT if outbursts related to PTSD)
- ◆ Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT)
- ◆ Family therapy

	<p><b>Level 2</b></p> <p>If Level 1 interventions are not successful, re-assess:</p> <p>Initial medication treatment should target the primary disorder(s) (when available, follow evidence-based guidelines for primary disorder).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Always treat primary disorder fully first before addressing aggression with other pharmacologic agents. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◇ Treat comorbid ADHD per guidelines. Refer to page 15.</li> <li>◇ Treat comorbid Anxiety Disorders per guidelines. Refer to page 33.</li> <li>◇ Treat comorbid Mood Disorders per guidelines. Refer to page 38 for Bipolar Disorder, page 50 for Major Depressive Disorder, and page 43 for Disruptive Mood Dysregulation Disorder</li> <li>◇ Treat comorbid psychotic disorders. Refer to page 62.</li> </ul> </li> <li>◆ Consider monotherapy with methylphenidate formulation, then amphetamine formulation or alpha-2 agonist, then atomoxetine.</li> <li>◆ Consider combination therapy of stimulant with an alpha-2 agonist.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Level 3</b></p> <p>If Level 2 interventions are not successful, re-evaluate diagnosis and past interventions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Consider switching to or adding an antipsychotic medication to ongoing psychosocial and/or pharmacological treatments (after an adequate trial), taking into account the latest evidence on efficacy and safety of individual agents. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◇ Risperidone or aripiprazole are recommended. Titrate to appropriate dose to target symptoms given level of impairment.</li> </ul> </li> <li>◆ Use recommended titration schedules and deliver medication trial at adequate dose and duration before changing or adding medication. Refer to Table 8 on page 30. Before changing, make sure that medications have been administered at an appropriate dose and duration and that adequate psychosocial interventions addressing adherence have been implemented. Monitor and manage adverse effects and non-response.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Level 4</b></p> <p>If failure to respond to Level 3 or insufficient response, switch to a different antipsychotic (either risperidone or aripiprazole).</p>
	<p><b>Level 5</b></p> <p>If failure to respond to risperidone or aripiprazole, consider other antipsychotics for which less evidence exists. Refer to Table 8 on page 30.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ When patient responds only partially to a first-line antipsychotic medication, first reassess the diagnosis, adequacy of behavioral interventions, pharmacotherapy for any identified primary or comorbid disorder, and dose/duration of the medication trial.</li> <li>◆ Consider monotherapy with a mood stabilizer (lithium or valproate).</li> </ul>
<p><b>Not Recommended:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ The use of two antipsychotics simultaneously (unless during cross-titration or plateau switch).</li> <li>◆ Use of Long Acting Intramuscular (IM) formulations of antipsychotics to treat aggression (lack of evidence in the pediatric population).</li> </ul>	

**Table 8.**

<b>Treatment of Aggression in Children and Adolescents Ages 6 to 17: Level of Evidence and Dosing Recommendations<sup>o</sup></b>		
<b>Medication</b>	<b>Children (&gt;6 years)</b>	<b>Adolescents (13-17 years)</b>
†Methylphenidate/ Amphetamines	See ADHD guidelines, page 13.	See ADHD guidelines, page 15.
†Clonidine, Guanfacine, Guanfacine ER	See ADHD guidelines, page 13.	See ADHD guidelines, page 15.
†Atomoxetine	Starting dose: See ADHD guidelines, page 13. Max dose: 1.8 mg/kg for children over 8 years old	Starting dose: See ADHD guidelines, page 15. Max dose: 1.8 mg/kg for children over 8 years old
Risperidone <i>*Not recommended first line due to side effect profile</i>	Starting dose: 0.1 to 0.25 mg/day Max dose: 2 mg/day	Starting dose: 0.5 mg/day Max dose: 3 mg/day
Aripiprazole <i>*Not recommended first line due to side effect profile</i>	Starting dose: 1 to 2.5 mg/day Max dose: 10 mg/day	Starting dose: 1 to 2.5 mg/day Max dose: 15 mg/day
Lithium <i>*Not recommended first line due to side effect profile</i>	Blood level: 0.6 mEq/L Max blood level should be 1.2 mEq/L	Blood level: 0.6 mEq/L Max blood level should be 1.2 mEq/L
Haloperidol <i>*Not recommended first line due to side effect profile</i>	Starting dose: 0.25 to 0.5 mg/day Max dose: 4 to 6 mg/day	Starting dose: 0.5 mg/day Max dose: 6 to 10 mg/day
Chlorpromazine <i>*Not recommended first line due to side effect profile</i>	Starting dose: 25 mg/day Max dose: 200 mg/day	Starting dose: 25 to 50 mg/day Max dose: 400 mg/day
Valproate <i>*Use caution in female population due to side effect profile</i>	10-15 mg/kg/day in divided doses Blood level: 50-125 mcg/mL Dose determined by blood level. Max blood level should be 125 mcg/mL	10-15 mg/kg/day in divided doses Blood level: 50-125 mcg/mL Dose determined by blood level. Max blood level should be 125 mcg/mL

Table 8 (continued).

Treatment of Aggression in Children and Adolescents Ages 6 to 17: Level of Evidence and Dosing Recommendations <sup>o</sup>		
Medication	Children (>6 years)	Adolescents (13-17 years)
Olanzapine <i>*Not recommended first or second line due to metabolic side-effects and/or in pts with BMI ≥ 85%</i>	Starting dose: 1.25 to 2.5 mg/day Max dose: 15 mg/day	Starting dose: 2.5 to 5 mg/day Max dose: 20 mg/day
Quetiapine <i>*Not recommended first line in patients with BMI ≥ 85%</i>	Starting dose: IR: 12.5 mg twice per day ER: 25 mg once daily Max dose: 400 mg/day	Starting dose: IR: 25 mg twice per day ER: 50 mg once daily Max dose: 600 mg/day
Paliperidone <i>*Limited data below age 12</i>	Starting dose: 1.5 mg/day Max dose: 6 mg/day	Starting dose: 1.5 to 3 mg/day Max dose: 12 mg/day
Asenapine	Not recommended under 10 years old. Can be given to children and adolescents 10-17 years old. Starting dose: 2.5 mg sublingual (SL) twice per day Max dose: 20 mg/day	Can be given to children and adolescents 10-17 years old. Starting dose: 2.5 mg SL twice per day Max dose: 20 mg/day
Lurasidone	FDA approved for schizophrenia, ages 13-17 years FDA approved for bipolar I depression, ages 10-17 years  Starting dose: 20 mg/day Suggested dosing: 20 to 80 mg/day Max dose (6-9 years old): 100 mg/day	FDA approved for schizophrenia, ages 13-17 years FDA approved for bipolar I depression, ages 10-17 years  Suggested dosing: 20 mg/day to 80 mg/day Starting dose: 20 mg/day Max dose: 120 mg/day

<sup>o</sup>mg = milligrams; mEq/L = milliequivalents per liter; mcg/L = micrograms per milliliter

<sup>†</sup>Note: Methylphenidate, amphetamines, alpha-agonists (clonidine, guanfacine), and atomoxetine are recommended prior to other treatment regimens due to better side-effect profile in combination with evidence for use.

For a full list of references, visit <https://floridabhcenter.org/>.