

1-1-1992

# The causes and characteristics of the passive-aggressive personality and effective behavioral modification programs

Patricia Jane Larson

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.stritch.edu/etd>



Part of the [Special Education and Teaching Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Larson, Patricia Jane, "The causes and characteristics of the passive-aggressive personality and effective behavioral modification programs" (1992). *Master's Theses, Capstones, and Projects*. 1000.  
<https://digitalcommons.stritch.edu/etd/1000>

THE CAUSES AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE  
PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE PERSONALITY AND EFFECTIVE  
BEHAVIORAL MODIFICATION PROGRAMS

by

Patricia Jane Larson

A RESEARCH PAPER  
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS IN EDUCATION  
(SPECIAL EDUCATION/EMOTIONAL DISTURBANCE)  
AT CARDINAL STRITCH COLLEGE

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

1992

This research paper has been  
approved for the Graduate Committee  
of the Cardinal Stritch College by

Sister Joanne Marie Kiebohn  
(Advisor)

Date Nov. 8, 1991

This paper is dedicated to  
my husband, Mike, for his constant  
patience and encouragement and to  
my children, Dee Dee, Mick, and Trina  
for their mature attitudes.

## Table of Contents

I. CHAPTER 1	
A. Introduction	1
B. Purpose of the Study	2
C. Scope and Limitations	3
D. Definitions	4
E. Summary	5
II. CHAPTER 2	
A. Review of Literature	
1. Diagnostic Criteria	7
2. How a Passive-Aggressive Personality is Created	10
3. Manifestations and Characteristics of Passive-Aggressive Personality Disorder	18
4. Coping Interventions for Parents and Teachers	26
B. Behavior Modifications for Passive- Aggressive Behaviors	
1. Behavior Modification Defined	33
2. Effective Behavior Modifications	37
III. CHAPTER 3	
A. Summary	49
B. Conclusions	56
C. Recommendations	58

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

"I left in on the bus."

"I just have to tie my shoe."

"I can't find it."

"I don't know how to do this."

"I didn't hear you."

As educators and parents we have encountered children who have stated the above and have displayed the following challenging characteristics:

- (1) procrastination
- (2) dawdling
- (3) stubbornness
- (4) intentional inefficiency
- (5) forgetfulness

These are several identifying characteristics of a passive-aggressive personality. Their behaviors drive teachers and parents to an uncontrollable rage of yelling and shouting. Soon the adults and child engage in a power struggle in which no one ended up victorious.

Medically this label was not applied to an elementary student since the DSM III-R did not identify this personality disorder until early adulthood, yet we have often

seen the tendencies toward a passive-aggressive personality disorder at this level.

As a teacher of emotionally disturbed (E.D.) students at the elementary level, the writer often had students who display the characteristics of a passive-aggressive personality. This author's first year in E.D. presented the challenge of "Billy".

"Billy" displayed many if not all of the tendencies of a passive-aggressive personality. Unfortunately, being unable to appropriately respond to "Billy", more problems were created, and little help was offered to "Billy". Since that introductory year in E.D. many "Billys" have sat in the classroom.

We know that a student in our room is not learning, but we do not know exactly why. How do we appropriately and effectively respond to a procrastinating and dawdling student?

#### Purpose of the Study

Our students come to us in a variety of sizes, from many variations of family backgrounds, and with many emotional and behavior challenges. One of those emotional challenges is the student who displays the characteristics of the passive aggressive personality disorder.

The many characteristics of a passive-aggressive child

have been identified and examined. The background factors which appear to cause a passive-aggressive individual to develop were addressed. Finally, how parents and teachers could appropriately and effectively cope and manage with the specific passive-aggressive behaviors are suggested.

The intent of this study was to help identify these characteristics, formulate an appropriate and effective behavior management program, provide a review of some of the current literature, define terms used, and present it in an organized way that would be beneficial to teachers and parents of children who display a tendency toward passive-aggressive behaviors.

#### Scope and Limitations

This study was designed to aid parents and educators with a source of information which could assist them to appropriately deal with and modify the passive-aggressive personality disorder behavior exhibited by their child and student. The focus of this study was an attempt to identify and describe the manifestations of the emotionally disturbed elementary aged children, six through pre-teen, with a passive-aggressive personality, discuss methods of evaluation, examine background factors that appear to cause this behavior style, review current effective ways to interact and cope with this behavior, and discuss possible



appropriate behavior management systems to alter the child's personality disorder. Literature over the past thirteen years was extensively reviewed and presented in this paper.

[Clinically, the passive-aggressive personality disorders label is not applied to a child prior to adolescence.] Therefore, for this study the writer has referred to the child as "displaying the characteristics of" or showing "tendencies toward" a passive-aggressive personality.

#### Definitions

For the sake of clarity and common understanding of terms used in this report, the following definitions have been provided:

Behavior management - practices and strategies aimed at the prevention of a crisis situation.

Behavior modification - procedures that can be used presently and effectively to change an inappropriate behavior.

Chronic - the occurrence of the behavior over a period of time, a minimum of six months, and despite intervention, has been resistant to change.

Emotionally disturbed - a child whose emotional, social, or behavior patterns in the home, school, or community interfere with his personal development and

educational program.

Frequent - refers to the number of times a behavior occurs within a specific time period.

[Passive-aggressive - behaviors exhibited by individuals to resist external demands from authority figures and tend to react instead of proact (Barnes, 1990).]

Punishment - any stimulus that follows a behavior that decreases the likelihood that the behavior will re-occur.

Reinforcement - any stimulus that follows a behavior that increases the probability that a specific behavior will re-occur.

Severe - refers to the degree to which the behavior interferes with the functioning within acceptable limits.

Target Behavior - a behavior identified that one wants to increase, decrease, or extinguish.

#### Summary

[Pre-adolescent children are not clinically labeled passive-aggressive, yet at home, in the regular education classroom, and in programs for the emotionally disturbed we are challenged with pre-adolescents who exhibit tendencies toward this personality disorder.] This behavior was unique in its manifestations and to appropriately cope with a child who displays these behaviors, educators and parents

need to develop an effective behavioral modification and management program within the child's environment.

This study focused on definitions applicable to this study and the causes and characteristics of passive-aggressive personality disorder. It was limited to children aged six to pre-teen. Current behavior modifications and behavior management systems were reviewed and presented to enable parents and educators to effectively and appropriately interact and successfully cope with a passive-aggressive personality disordered child.

Chapter two presents a review of the literature on this topic and presents recommended appropriate coping interventions and behavior management programs.

## CHAPTER 2

## Review of Literature

Diagnostic Criteria

The term passive-aggressive is conflicting and confusing. How could an individual be passive and aggressive simultaneously? To understand the characteristics and traits of the Passive-Aggressive Personality Disorder, the definition and criteria required to make a diagnosis are presented. This disorder was listed and set forth in the Diagnostic Criteria from the Diagnostic and Statistics Manual-III-R of the American Psychiatric Association (1987). The criteria are as follows:

- A. Passive-Aggressive Personality Disorder refers to behaviors or traits that are characteristic of the person's recent (past year) and long-term functioning (generally since adolescence or early adulthood). The constellation of behaviors or traits causes either significant impairment in social or occupational functioning or subjective distress.
- B. A pervasive pattern of passive resistance to demands for adequate social and occupational performance, beginning by early adulthood and present in a variety of contexts, as indicated by at least five of the following:
  - (1) procrastinates, i.e., puts off things that need to be done so that deadlines are not met.
  - (2) becomes sulky, irritable, or argumentative when asked to do something he or she does not want to do.

- (3) seems to work deliberately slowly or to do a bad job on tasks that he or she really does not want to do.
- (4) protests, without justification, that others make unreasonable demands on him or her.
- (5) avoids obligations by claiming to have "forgotten".
- (6) believes that he or she is doing a much better job than others think he or she is doing.
- (7) resents useful suggestions from others concerning how he or she could be more productive.
- (8) obstructs the efforts of others by failing to do his or her share of the work.
- (9) unreasonably criticizes or scorns people in positions of authority (p. 200).

Displayment of these behaviors alone does not identify a child as exhibiting tendencies toward a passive-aggressive personality. Many individuals demonstrate these behaviors sometime in their interactions with others. As reported by Kauffman, Cullinan, and Epstein (1987) these manifested behaviors become significant and problematic when they interfere with the child's total education program and development, and include the following exhibited behaviors as the child's past:

- A. denies their behavior
- B. blames others for their behavior
- C. is not organized
- D. is inattentive
- E. has a persistent negative attitude
- F. seems tired or without energy
- G. avoids eye contact

- H. does not display feelings
- I. academic achievement is below potential
- J. won't, can't or doesn't complete tasks
- K. daydreams (p. 181)

These behaviors become significant and handicapping when severity, chronicity, or frequency are characterized and are, "manifested in two or more of the child's social systems, e.g., school, home, or community," (Kauffman, Cullinan, and Epstein, 1987, p. 180).

Having defined the criteria for a diagnosis and identified the exhibited behaviors, the writer researched the published theories as to the probable causes for a child to develop the tendencies toward a passive-aggressive personality disorder.

How a Passive-Aggressive Personality is Created

[How does a passive-aggressive personality develop?]

Was a passive-aggressive child born that way or raised in an inappropriate environment that nurtures this behavior?]

The review of literature presented a possibility of several answers to these questions.

[It is unfair to state that all passive-aggressive individuals have had a similar background. Barnes (1990) supported the theory that the passive-aggressive child becomes hypersensitive and is prepared to respond explosively and unpredictably at the slightest provocation due to being raised in a state of constant alertness, more contradictory attitudes and inconsistent training from parents.] [According to Barnes (1990) the passive-aggressive child is raised on parental inconsistencies and is unable to predict whether obedience or resistance would be more effective in a given situation.] He contended this is due to the parent's tendencies to vacillate between rejection and hostility, to love and affection. These vacillations are present from an early age and cause the child to develop conflicts of trust versus mistrust, competence versus doubt, and self-reliance versus guilt and fear.

Barnes (1990) stated that the passive-aggressive's family appears to send conflicting and incompatible

messages. [The child is never sure what the parents really want. Regardless of the action taken by the child, one parent finds that the child acts incorrectly. The child becomes confused and anxious and learns to delay a thought or action so to avoid doing something wrong.]

[Berres and Long (1979) likewise supported the theory that the passive-aggressive child is formed at a very early age, most frequently promoted by successful middle-class parents.] Parental achievements are due to hard work and now they want the best for their child. They desire their child to be well liked, accepted, and valued because the child is an extension of the parents' beliefs and values. To reflect positively on the parents, their child has to be "good". [The passive-aggressive child is taught that "good children" are never angry, hostile, or sarcastic. "Good children" get along easily with others, have nice thoughts, nice behavior, and never think or speak in negative terms.] Being raised within this environment cause the child to deny, project, and defend against his normal feelings of anger and frustration and his passive-aggressive personality is formed.

["Specialness" is the earliest message that a passive-aggressive child receives according to White (1984). The cause of this specialness varies, yet, it is always present in the child's upbringing. They are special due to



family position and wealth. One may be special because he is the first son and grandson of a wealthy family. Another may be special since she is the only child of an older couple. White (1984) related the incident of "John" who was reminded often by his mother that she aborted a second child so she could devote all her time only to him since he was so "special" and important to her. The child became a prized object to her.

White (1984) contended the passive-aggressive child is locked into a frustrating and helpless unit with Mother which encircle Father who handles outside realities. Father is the power figure who does the majority of the thinking and rule giving for the family. Mother interprets and carries out the rules and messages from Father. Around three years of age the passive-aggressive child has developed an awareness that Mother and self are bonded together in helplessness controlled by Father who is perceived as an arbitrary and distant figure. Mother, usually the primary parenting figure, is seen by the passive-aggressive child as controlled by an outside force which is Father.

During the first six to eight months of life, the Mother is totally involved with the child and operates out of a child ego state in meeting the needs of the infant. She tends to treat the infant as if it were a doll to be

caressed, dressed, and walked by her as her mood dictates. Her mothering was described as: over-anxious, over-doting, and over attentive (White, 1984). This environment produces internal confusion within the passive-aggressive child as to how to identify himself in the world from, "I am wonderful," to "I am helpless" (p. 126). The author stated that between 15 and 36 months the mother shadows the child, rejects independent functioning, and insists the child cling to her which leads to hostile dependency, which White (1984) perceived was an "earmark" of the passive-aggressive personality. At this stage the passive-aggressive child learns to alternate his behaviors between wooing and temper tantrums. Now Father enters the scene. During temper tantrums Father directs Mother to, "Do something about that child" (p. 126).

Within the three to seven year age period, White (1984) addressed the fact that a healthy child nurtured in a healthy family would have reached individuation and separation from the mother, and emotional interactions with the father, siblings, and playmates. However, this is not the case for a passive-aggressive child. According to White (1984), the passive-aggressive child reaches this age period with the following severe handicaps:

1. The child thinks he has to feel what the Mother feels in order to get his needs met.

2. His mother likes him best when he is baby-like.
3. Mother is influenced and controlled by Father.
4. Temper tantrums would make Father force Mother to take care of his needs.
5. Mother receives satisfaction when he upsets Father.

White (1984) continued to stress that [the passive-aggressive child engages in minimum active social play and tends to engage in solitary, passive play of drawing, playing with dolls, walking with adults, or making up games on his own with an occasional suggestion from Mother.] This child is restricted in his development of interpersonal, people skills usually learned within the complex social negotiations necessary in play. He is raised with a strong family theme of not needing others and a feeling of superiority towards others which is declared by the father and supported by the mother. White (1984) stated that an, "Existential position of I'm O.K. - you're not O.K." is reached during these years (p. 127).

White (1984) reported that the father of the passive-aggressive child between the ages of 7 and 13 begins to assume a more active interest in the instruction of the child, usually directed toward the functioning within the world. Father is now the guide to be listened to seriously while Mother actively works to undermine Father. Earlier

childhood feelings of helplessness are reinforced through these new conflicting messages from Mother and Father. The results are the development of a "Don't think" behavior (p. 128).

Cole (1984) collaborated the belief of Barnes (1990) and White (1984) that a child is not born passive-aggressive. She suggests that this behavior is brought about by the "Power Struggle Game" played sufficiently hard between the parents and child. Within this game there are the "Persecutors" and "Victims". The "Persecutors" are played by people in authority, such as parents and teachers, who attempt to force and coerce the "Victim" or child into making changes which are supposedly for the "Victim's" own good. Within this "Power Struggle Game" the child is trained in powerlessness and reacts to the persecution by doing poorly in school or refusing to work.

The dynamics of "The Power Struggle Game" consist of two steps as reported by Cole (1984). Step one involves trying to get the "Victim" to do anything in a way that turns him off. The "Persecutor" gives a command with a threat attached and no reason. The command or invitation would be given in a nagging, sarcastic, or negative tone of voice along with numerous unreasonable demands.

The second step of the game involves setting up a situation in which the "Victim" or child would not or could

not directly refuse to do what was asked or demanded by the "Persecutor". It is made known by the "Persecutor" that the child could not talk back or show anger. Cole (1984) stated the "Victim's" biggest problems are lack of self-esteem and not knowing his real capabilities.

[Bowen (1977)] also stressed [that a passive-aggressive child is the product of his environment. He reinforced the belief that a passive-aggressive child is raised with coercion, nagging, and threats administered by overprotective, overcontrolling, and domineering parents who create anger in the child.] It was reported that every child requires love, affection, and attention, yet this child is denied these appropriate nurturing qualities.

Overcontrolling, domineering parents focus on the child's failures to do things. They holler, spank, threaten, and punish the child into doing things for which there are no good reasons.

Overprotective parents prevent the child from doing things instead of forcing the child to do things. The focus is on teaching the child to be afraid of many things. For example, they would foster the fear of doctors and hospitals in the child. When the child asked to play outside on a cold, rainy day they would say he could not. Upon objection, the child would be told that he would get sick and would then have to go to the hospital and, "You

don't want to go there, do you?" Bowen (1977) stated these parents tend to smother their child with "good intentions."

Both the overcontrolling and the overprotetive parents are overinvolved in their child's lives, fail to give sufficient positive attention, and cause anger in their child. A passive-aggressive child is nurtured to become angry but is never taught how to appropriately direct this anger. Bowen (1977) reported that this child learns to not talk about this anger with the person who had caused the anger within him. This paralled Coe's (1984) theory of "Persecutor" and "Victim" scenario. The passive-aggressive child is raised within anger and unhappiness so that his only gratification is derived from angering, upsetting, frustrating, disappointing, or shocking his parents.

Barnes (1990), White (1984), Cole (1984), Berres and Long (1979), and Bowen (1977) presented varied causal factors for a passive-aggressive personality to develop. Review of the literature indicated that the passive-aggressive child is not born that way but learns this behavior from being raised in an enviornment that creates internal anger and helplessness in the child with no model or permission to appropriately display that anger or cope with the helplessness. The passive-aggressive child is raised by overcontrolling and overdemanding parents within "The Power Struggle Game" environment to be a "good" child.

To survive the inappropriate nurturing environment, the passive-aggressive child has to learn coping techniques and tactics.

Characteristics of the  
Passive-Aggressive Personality Disorder

[What are the characteristics and inappropriate coping techniques used by the passive-aggressive personality child?]  
The review of literature presented similar manifestations of this personality behavior.

[White (1984) reported on the games the passive-aggressive child learns to play in order to cope with his frustration and helplessness brought about by his "specialness". He labeled and defined three typical games enacted in the passive-aggressive family.]

[In the "Blemish" game, Mother finds faults in everyone including neighbors, child's friends, Dad, and teachers. Through this game, Mother wards off her own depression, friendships are avoided, and her own deficiencies are not revealed.]

[By making this child look down on others and having reinforced the "I'm good - you're bad" belief, the passive-

aggressive child is now bound to Mother (p. 129).]

[To avoid feelings of sexual intimacy, the "Uproar" games are played. It was first played by Mom and Dad but was learned well by the passive-aggressive child to avoid any sexual feelings toward a parent or the parent toward the child. Within this game angry accusations are made by the players which result in the players storming out of the room in opposite directions, slamming doors behind them, only to sulk in private.]

[The last game White (1984) defined was the "Schlemiel" game in which the passive-aggressive child learns to reestablish contact with Mother by showing her how hard he is trying to do something. The child makes a mess but avoids punishment and responsibility for the act due to his legitimate reasoning of, "Look how hard I am trying." This game, White (1984) suggested, only reinforces the child's feelings of helplessness and blamelessness.]

Barnes (1990) elaborated on the manifestations exhibited in the passive-aggressive child which consist of several prominent features.

He reported that these children tend to be argumentative and nitpicking. They seize on any inconsistency or any minor point which they can enlarge into a major dispute. Their goal is to wear down the other person so they win through



greater perserverance.

Authority is constantly challenged by this child, and he views himself as always right, as reported by Barnes (1990). Every discussion is seen as an argument with a yes or no answer. The person who says the last word wins the discussion literally. This child wins these discussions through generalities, intimidation, and perserverance instead of logic, moral rightness, or defined boundaries. This child is very good at selecting the location and time to challenge causing embarrassments to the authority figure. The name of the game is to win at any cost.

[Stubbornness, in a passive not physical way, is another prominent feature of the passive-aggressive personality. Seen here is pouting, sulking, withdrawing, and walking away.] Also seen is "pseudo-dumbness" to suit the child's purpose: "I forgot," "I didn't know," "You didn't tell me," and "I meant to," (Barnes, 1990, p. 3).]

Legalism is spouted by this child. His ploy is to wear down others, work on their guilt, and use legalistic strategies regarding his rights, freedoms, and privileges but never mentions his responsibilities. If a loophole or weak point can be found, this child exploits it with the authority figure in the hopes the request would be withdrawn.

Barnes (1990) discussed how the passive-aggressive child is in a constant battle for control. All criticisms, even constructive ones, are taken as negative. Due to his sense of blamelessness and superiority he can not tolerate being told what to do, how to do it, or when to do it. This child develops an amazing ability to turn around fault and guilt.

[Abrasive and the ability to raise negative feelings within others such as exasperation, anger, and general distaste in order to win, is another manifestation of the passive-aggressive personality reported by Barnes (1990).] Since winning is the primary objective, the child will feign exasperation and ignorance, will walk away, or stop interacting if he feels he is losing, yet he will never admit to losing.

Due to the "Games" learned, as suggested by White (1984), the last cardinal feature of a passive-aggressive child is his ability to excuse himself and rationalize his long time lack of concrete achievements. Barnes (1990) stated that the frequently heard comments were: "I could have done it, if I had truly tried," or "I could have done that if the teacher didn't hate me!" (p. 5).

Barnes (1990) presented the passive-aggressive child as manifesting a subtle form of rebelliousness and unwillingness to conform to authority. This child tends

to be cynical and saw an offense as the best defense. To maintain his fragile self esteem he resorts to argumentation, excuse making, and silence as a means to gaining control in what is viewed as an ongoing battle between himself and the world.

Berres and Long (1979) identified and documented these six common tactics utilized in the classroom by a passive-aggressive child: selective vision, selective hearing, slow down tactics, losing objects, destructive volunteer tactics, and don't ask me for help.

They reported that in selective vision the child is unable to find or see something he is asked to find but does not want to find in the first place. The child might have been asked to get a ball from the box so a game could begin. He walks to the box, pushes objects around and states he can not find the object. After several verbal exchanges, the teacher walks over, finds the object, and mutters some derogatory comment under her breath where upon the child looks surprised, smiles and remarks, "You found it."

Similar to selective vision, a passive-aggressive child's hearing becomes selective or dissolved when asked to do something he does not want to do. A directive is repeatedly given by the teacher to the child with no

response. Soon the teacher feels irritated at the child's refusal to acknowledge her presence and requests and shouts the child's name. In a thoughtful kind tone the child responds that he did not hear her.)

[Often we hear the statement, "I'm coming," yet the child never comes until the teacher or parent is near a temper tantrum or screaming the directive. The passive-aggressive child effectively uses the slow down tactic to complete just one more reasonable but untimely task before complying with the authority's request. Again the child succeeds in controlling a situation in which the teacher loses control and resorts to anger.]

It was reported that a passive-aggressive personality expresses his anger in passive ways such as constantly losing objects, constantly leaving his books at home, leaving his lunch on the playground or his pencils on a shelf. Just to receive gratification in seeing the teacher upset, this child is purposely negligent.

The destructive volunteer tactic is a skill developed by the passive-aggressive child in which he volunteers to help yet creates so much of a secondary mess that chaos follows. Berres and Long (1979) stated this child volunteers to water the plants but manages to knock over a plant, spill water on the floor, step on another student's

foot, and bump into another student coloring. Finally, the teacher shouts out she never wants that student's help again, whereupon the passive-aggressive personality replies he just wanted to help!.

Berres and Long (1979) reported the last effective yet equally frustrating tactic employed by this child is his ability to ask for help and then make it impossible for the person to help him. He stares at the ceiling, taps his pencil on the desk or book, rocks in his chair, plays with an eraser while the teacher attempts to help him. Finally disgusted and angered, the teacher stats, "Don't ask me for help anymore!" (p. 30.)

These tactics exemplified Barnes' (1990) manifestations of a passive-aggressive child. As detailed by Berres and Long (1984), the tactics of selective vision, selective hearing, slow down, losing objects, destructive volunteer, and don't ask me for help are effective vehicles through which a passive-aggressive child can express his anger indirectly and passively while he appears proper, polite, sorry, and confused at the teacher's behavior. These tactics are effectively used by the child to slowly and painfully break down the authority figure until she loses control and resorts to shouting and yelling. At this explosive point by Cole's (1984) "Persecutor" (teacher),

Cole's (1984) "Victim" (child) said to himself, "Look how crazy adults act when they express their feelings! It's very dangerous. I am lucky I can keep mine under control and underground," (Berres and Long, 1984, p. 28).

Bowen (1977) stated the passive-aggressive child has a tendency toward self-destruction. Through self-destruction this child has the power to harm himself that no one can effectively control and through which he can then hurt and frustrate others like Cole's (1984) "Persecutors". He reported that the passive-aggressive child is his own worst enemy, and his inappropriate ways of dealing with his anger lead him on a degenerative course of more unhappiness.)

The review of literature collaborated the similarities displayed by this child. They repress anger, seek control of most situations, and are argumentative.

As parents and educators we are obligated to identify these characteristics, tactics, and manifestations employed and exhibited by a passive-aggressive child. Having identified these traits is only part of the task. Once recognized, the task of utilizing appropriate coping interventions toward this child becomes monumental and crucial.

Coping Interventions for  
Parents and Teachers

To implement effective and appropriate coping interventions for the passive-aggressive child, parents and educators have to keep in mind the complexity of the task involved.

O'Loughlin (1984) stressed there are two primary sources of influences which shape the changes we have undergone regarding our conceptual view of the passive-aggressive child. First, we have acquired an abundance of knowledge over the years regarding the normal and abnormal development of a passive-aggressive child including his social and personality development. Secondly, due to the acquisition of this information, we have come to know this child better.

Landfried (1989) reminded us that the passive-aggressive child learned his behaviors well and now a new behavior has to be learned. As parents and teachers of a passive-aggressive child we have to stop enabling, have to recognize and respond to the passive-aggressive child, and learn how to manage the behavior effectively.

Barnes (1990) suggested several specific interventions to cope effectively with a passive-aggressive child. He

recommended that one request a specific action from the passive-aggressive child by stating one's position concisely, clearly, and then quit. He stressed that one ask only once without explanation and to expect action. Well defined consequences for non-action are to be explained calmly and in advance.]

Davidhizar (1983) elaborated on this theme by stating that this confrontation must be done in a direct, matter-of-fact, and calm manner. When the passive-aggressive child responds unsatisfactorily, explicit, realistic, fair, enforceable limits and their consequences should be spelled out to the child by his teacher or parents. She cautions that these directives should never be stated in a hostile, sarcastic, or punitive manner.

The child needs and wants an audience, someone who would argue with him and give a reaction. Barnes (1990) reported that the adult's reaction is all the passive-aggressive child needs to have his behavior reinforced, increased, or continued. Therefore, Barnes (1990) suggested removing the child and yourself from the presence of others and from each other. He recommends that both of you exit to separate rooms or opposite ends of the room. Bowen (1977) stressed that the adult not lose her temper or composure in reaction to the passive-aggressive behavior.



Berres and Long (1979) emphasized that the parent's and teacher's impatience and explosiveness is one of the passive-aggressive child's most powerful weapons. The child uses it to get them riled or forces them to do some action with which the passive-aggressive child could then retaliate. Barnes (1990) recommended that the parent and teacher refuse to allow the passive-aggressive child to make them responsible for his behavior or to make them feel guilty. The child must take all consequences for his chosen behavior. Parents and teachers then act as a resource but do not do the task for the passive-aggressive child or mediate for him.

Davidhizar (1983) concurred that the passive-aggressive child must learn to accept responsibility for his behaviors. Barnes (1990) stressed that parents and teachers should not feel sorry for the child and begin mediating for him with friends, school, relatives, or others. The passive-aggressive child needs to recognize that he is responsible for creating those poor relationships and is responsible for working his own way out of them.

Davidhizar (1983) stated that the behaviors of acting hurt, pouting, sulking, slamming doors, sighing deeply, forgetfulness, depression, stubbornness, or intentional inefficiency are employed by the passive-aggressive individual to manipulate parents, teachers, and others by

triggering guilt reactions within them. Therefore, another coping device essential to effectively intervene with this child is ignoring and outwaiting him. Davidhizar (1983) stated that ignoring is absolutely the worst form of discipline imaginable to a passive-aggressive child. Even negative attention is better than being completely ignored.

Yet, Barnes (1990) emphasized that positive reinforcement for a particular behavior is most desired by the passive-aggressive child, but negative reinforcement runs a close second. Barnes (1990) suggested that parents and teachers learn the child's predictable sequences of inappropriate behaviors and intervene early in the sequence before a crisis develops. To ask what is wrong or to apologize is to mollify the passive-aggressive child.

This child often plays on the adult's need or guilt to be a good parent, to be an effective teacher, to be fair, to be reasonable, or to be sure he turns out well. Many people reward the passive-aggressive child for his behaviors through their negative emotional responses of becoming upset, frustrated, shocked, or disappointed. Removing these reactions would cause the passive-aggressive individual to eventually stop, since he will not be receiving anything from his passive-aggressive behaviors. When the child learns he inconvenienced only himself through his passive-aggressive behaviors he no longer will

be motivated to continue doing them (Bowen, 1977).

Barnes (1990) reported that the passive-aggressive child learns early and well to outwait his parents and to persist beyond any reasonable limits. Therefore, Barnes (1990) stressed that great patience and perseverance in outlasting the passive-aggressive child is required by parents and teachers to effectively cope and subsequently shorten the passive-aggressive child's stubborn periods.

Barnes (1990) reported that the passive-aggressive child would respond, "It was your fault. My behavior was only a reaction to what you did and to you. If you would be different, I would respond differently" (p. 10). The recommended response was, "What happened to you was your own doing. Act differently and the consequences would be different" (p. 10). Davidhizar (1983) stressed that the child has to learn to accept responsibility for his feelings and behaviors. The consequences for his feelings and behaviors are his to decide and are not the parent's or teacher's responsibility.

Often the child is very good at displaying his behaviors to one parent so his allied opposite parent thinks no problems existed. Barnes (1990) recommended getting this opposite parent more involved in the child's care and discipline so that the allied parent would then learn of the difficulties being experienced by the other

parent and be more supportive to the spouse.

Since excessive parental overcontrol creates anger and power struggles between the passive-aggressive child and parents, Bowen (1977) reported that anger could be eliminated by changing the patterns of influence between child and parent. He recommended the best course of action is for the parents to use positive means of influence. This involves strengthening desirable behaviors in the child by responding positively to him or her through praise, attention, providing special privileges, or providing material rewards. If you want the child to put away his toys at the end of the day, the parent could strengthen this behavior by praising the child when he does put away his toys, or the parents could spend some positive time with the child by reading to the child. The passive-aggressive child not only learns to do things to please the parents, but he also learns to want to do these appropriate behaviors when he is motivated through a positive approach as opposed to coercion (Bowen, 1977).

In the classroom, Petty (1989) recommended that the teacher stop class to quickly deal with the inappropriate passive-aggressive behavior. He reported that more time-on-task is ultimately devoted to academic lessons when teachers stop class immediately to deal with the inappropriate behavioral problems. Petty (1989) stated

that teachers should maintain high expectations for appropriate behavior and be generous with their praise, reinforcement, and feedback.

To effectively cope with a child who displays some degree of passive-aggressive behavior requires a close coordination between parents and teachers involved with the child. Constant pushing without nagging or losing one's temper has to occur. Priorities regarding which behaviors to be concerned about have to be discussed between parents and teachers. To do everything at once would be an overwhelming task. Patience and perseverance are necessary coping interventions along with behavior modification programs.

The next section of this paper examines and reports on various behavior modification programs recommended as effective techniques to alter the behaviors of a passive-aggressive child in the home and school.

Behavior Modification for  
Passive-Aggressive Behaviors

Behavior Modification Defined

[ Before an effective behavior modification plan can be applied, an understanding and knowledge of its components is necessary. Buckholdt and Gubrium (1980) described the application of behavior modification as requiring technical skill and precision whereby the important behavioral problems of the child are pinpointed in precise categories and counted. The authority figure then develops and implements a program to counteract the behavioral problems and thus modifies them. Then the behaviors are counted again to assess any change. ]

The behavior problems or "target behaviors" (p. 282) were identified by Klotz (1987) as behaviors particularly problematic for the child. To be selected as "target behaviors", the behaviors have to be observable and reliably measured. Buckholdt and Gubrium (1980) cautioned that only real problems are to be selected, and advised identification of a precise behavior, such as the passive-aggressive child expressing his anger in the passive way of constantly losing objects.

Soon after the target behavior is selected, Buckholdt and Gubrium (1980) stated that baseline measures need to be taken over a three to five days period. These baseline data reflect the level of the target behavior's natural occurrence before intervention. They suggested four methods to measure baseline data.

For behaviors that are brief and have a definite beginning and end, frequency or event recording is the method of choice to gather baseline, as reported by Buckholdt and Gubrium (1980). This method records how often the behavior occurs during an observation period. They suggested that a simple numerical count such as a clicker counter or tally marks with pencil and paper is sufficient to record and measure the frequency of the target behavior.

A passive-aggressive child may be extremely slow in joining a group or may have a low frequency of pouting or sulking, but each incident lasts several minutes. If the length or latency of a behavior is its major characteristic and the one you want to change, Buckholdt and Gubrium (1980) suggested duration recording. This method monitors how long the target behavior lasts by recording the amount of time between the initiation of a response and its conclusion. They recommended a stop watch as the best precise measurement for duration recording. However, they

cautioned that this method tended to be unreliable and awkward.

A versatile technique for recording both discrete and continuous passive-aggressive behaviors is interval recording. A clip board and a watch with a second hand are all one needs, according to Buckholdt and Gubrium (1980). Interval recording is an observational recording system whereby the observation period is divided into a number of short intervals of ten seconds to one minute. During this time the observer counts the number of intervals during which the behavior occurs rather than recording the instances of the behavior.

The last method explained by Buckholdt and Gubrium (1980) to gather baseline data is time sampling. This method is similar to interval recording, except the intervals are much longer (five to twenty minutes), are less frequent, and may be varied. At the end of each interval an observation of the target behavior is made. For example, you may take a ten minute sample out of every hour for the passive-aggressive behavior of pouting. At the end of the specified interval, you immediately rate the occurrence or nonoccurrence of the target behavior.

Buckholdt and Gubrium (1980) stated that the advantage of this method is its unpredictability of each interval. The child may be aware of his behavior being observed,



but he cannot predict each interval and change his behavior when the time is up.

Behavior modification requires the utilization of at least one of these methods to obtain a measurable baseline from which to effectively modify a problem behavior. Buckholdt and Gubrium (1980) cautioned that it is difficult to both teach and baseline at the same time.

Once the target behavior has been observed and reliably measured through one or more of these baseline measures, an effective behavior modification program has to be applied to counteract the behavior problem. The next part of this paper identifies several effective behavior modifications for parents and teachers to break the conflict cycle and power struggle manifested by the passive-aggressive child.

Effective Behavior Modifications

Many children display the characteristics of passive-aggressive behaviors. When angry at someone, it is a very natural reaction for a child to not do something that parents and teachers want or expect of him. Bullock (1988) stated that a child who is not passive-aggressive will not engage in passive-aggressive behavior when his own welfare is at stake. Only when these behaviors become chronic, severe, or frequent, are identified as a mechanism of defense, identified as a personality trait, or identified as maladaptive patterns of coping are behavior modifications required, as stated by Perry and Flannery (1982).

They defined behavior modification as, "a systematic arrangement of environmental events (antecedent and consequent events) to produce changes in observable and measurable behavior" (p. 165). This section of the paper reports on several operative behavior modifications for the child who exhibits the characteristics and traits of the passive-aggressive personality disorder in the home and classroom.

A passive-aggressive child may have forgotten or never knew what are acceptable behaviors in the home or classroom situation. Riester (1984) and Klotz (1987)

stressed that age-appropriate social skills have to be taught so learning can occur. Several age-appropriate expected standard social skills recommended by Koltz (1987) are the following:

1. One time: the child should be in his assigned classroom at the designated time with his materials out, ready to work.
2. In place: in his assigned desk with the appropriate posture for the activity.
3. On task: works to completion on assigned tasks, follows directives given by authority figure, and participates appropriately in group activities.
4. Respect for property: the child maintains his personal belongings in a responsible manner and asks permission to borrow anyone else's items.
5. Appropriate language: the child talks at a normal volume, does not argue when given a directive, answers promptly when spoken to, and does not engage in verbally threatening behaviors.
6. Required materials: the child brings all necessary materials to each class.
7. Homework: the child brings completed work to school on the day and time assigned.
8. Ignores inappropriate behaviors: the child remains on task when other students are being

disruptive.

9. Refrains from inappropriate gestures: the child does not use his face or other body parts in a crude or peculiar manner (p. 6).

Klotz (1987) reported that a simple reminder stated calmly along with a brief explanation may be adequate to socialize the child. Butke (1988) suggested the use of "proximity control" (p. 16) to direct a passive-aggressive child toward an appropriate social skill. This technique requires the teacher to maintain a close distance to the student whereby the teacher walks by the passive-aggressive child in a non-controlling manner, maintains eye contact with the rest of the class but not with the passive-aggressive child. She recommended that the teacher continue walking quickly among the group and near the passive-aggressive child until the appropriate behavior is obtained and maintained.

With respect to nondisruptive passive-aggressive behaviors of pouting, sulking, or the silent treatment, Butke (1988) suggested the beneficial technique of planned ignoring. Through this technique parents and teachers avoid a situation in which they take the initiative to compromise and a win-lose contest is avoided. She did caution that praise should be given when the target behavior is appropriate.

Berres and Long (1979), Madden (1988), and Perry and Flannery (1982) concurred that the objective of the passive-aggressive child's tactics is inappropriate ways of expressing anger. They reported that the child's goal is to get the parent or teacher to be out of control so the parent or teacher will act wild and crazy but not the child.

The passive-aggressive child learns to deny his anger and is never shown how to appropriately express this anger. Reister (1984) suggested that parents and teachers should encourage the child to express his feelings. A technique to modify the passive-aggressive child's ability to express his anger appropriately and verbalize his feelings was explained by Butke (1988). She recommended general classroom discussions in which the teacher guides the class to talk about how they handle their feelings of anger. Through peer modeling and discussions the passive-aggressive child will slowly learn how normal and acceptable it is to have these feelings of anger and how rewarding it is to talk about them rather than acting them out or repressing them.

West (1989) taught the "one-step removed" (p. 21) technique for exploring feelings. Utilization of this technique requires teachers and parents to pose problem situations as "What could you do if..." or "What do you do

if..." or "Remember the last time..." or "When..." (p. 22). She stressed that by asking these questions we encourage an internal, self-protective step in the passive-aggressive child that validates his own personal experience. This is a safe invulnerable avenue for the passive-aggressive child to state his attitudes and feelings. West (1989) also advocated that every child should feel safe and be able to talk about any feelings to a trusted person.

Trust is not easy for the passive-aggressive child to develop. Anderson (1988) recommended physical closeness and touching as a vital way to communicate acceptance and to create a caring relationship. He stated that through such natural actions as holding, hugging, rocking, or gently touching a child while speaking to him or her, a positive communicating and learning atmosphere can be established. All of these actions can build a trusting relationship. Cole (1984) stated that kindness and empathy are the keys to connecting with the passive-aggressive child's feelings and winning his trust.

Anderson (1988) cautioned that the passive-aggressive child might resist certain forms of physical contact and in that situation the teacher's patience and respect for the child as a person would dictate when contact could be attempted and which type of closeness could be used. He stated that touch is the primary means by which teachers

and parents communicate an attitude of recognition, support, pride, and encouragement to a passive-aggressive child.

Streshly and Schaps (1989) suggested a management technique in which the teacher meets with the passive-aggressive child and in a matter-of-fact calm manner shares her concerns about his behavior. Between them a personal signal such as the teacher pointing to her ear can be arranged when the teacher feels the child is engaging in a passive-aggressive behavior. They believe that the significant adults need to do more than merely talk about the child's appropriate behavior, they need to help the child learn to be caring and responsible in class and the home by giving the child frequent opportunities to act on the values being taught.

Several methods were recommended by Streshly and Schap (1989) to achieve this goal. However, this author selectively chose the following as effective for modifying the inappropriate behaviors exhibited by the passive-aggressive child.

"Cooperative activities" (p. 25) provide the child an opportunity to work with others in small groups. Streshly and Schaps (1989) reported that the passive-aggressive child can develop an ability to verbalize his thoughts, learn to appreciate another's talent, and develop the

ability to rely on others to be successful.

Through "positive examples" (p. 26) of kindness, helpfulness, and responsibility regularly seen in adults and other children, Streshly and Schaps (1989) stated that the child will likely become aware that these appropriate behaviors represent core values in our society and will emulate them. They encourage teachers and parents to make comments to assist the passive-aggressive child in understanding what is being demonstrated.

The last model this writer selected was "developmental discipline" (p. 27). Streshly and Schaps (1989) reported that this technique helps the passive-aggressive child learn self-control and encourages him to participate in setting rules and solving problems for himself instead of passively waiting for his teachers or parents to make a ruling. Developmental discipline enables the child to develop a sense of shared control that if something negative is happening in his life, he does not view it as someone else's problem but as his problem, and he has to look for a solution. Streshly and Schaps (1989) stated that the passive-aggressive child learns to take responsibility for his own behavior.

The passive-aggressive child often is not receiving enough positive, nurturing attention from the significant adults in his life, and Canfield (1990) and Madden (1988)



stressed that the child's self-esteem has to be raised.

Since a child learns through modeling and imitation, Canfield (1990) stated that the adult-child interactions have to be positive, validating, affirming, and encouraging. He presented several strategies to help strengthen a passive-aggressive child's self-esteem.

He recommended that parents and teachers emphasize to the child that he is responsible for his behavior responses and that he take responsibility for changing those responses. The passive-aggressive child cannot continue to blame other people or external events when he does not get the outcomes he wants.

Canfield (1990) reported that the passive-aggressive child needs to identify and focus on positive successful aspects of his life and learn to replace negative thoughts with positive self-talk. He encouraged teaching the child to repeat the following sentence: "No matter what you say or do to me, I'm still a worthwhile person" (p. 49). He stated that this technique takes time and practice, but it really makes a difference.

An important part of self-esteem is the ability to identify one's strengths and resources. Canfield (1990) suggested that the passive-aggressive child write down and tell you what he sees as his positive qualities and strengths. Since his assessments need to be realistic as

well as positive, Canfield (1990) noted that it is important to help the child identify those areas that need more development if he is to achieve his goals.

The goal of improving a passive-aggressive child's self-esteem is to enable the child to like himself. Madden (1988) cautioned that although the language of praise is well intentioned, it is also judgmental and manipulative, and it is based on achievement. He suggested the "language of encouragement" (p. 51) rather than the language of praise. The language of encouragement implies th child is good enough as he is, it promotes self-reliance, self-direction, and cooperation within the child, and it recognizes the growth and contribution that the child makes.

Madden (1988) changed the following praise statements to encouragement declarations:

"You are an excellent student" to "You really enjoy learning. Your skills are growing. All of your hard work is paying off."

"You are terrific for helping me" to "Thank you for helping me. It will make our work go much easier."

"You wrote the best essay in the class" to "It is obvious that you are working hard on your writing techniques" (p. 52).

He stated that the language of encouragement recognizes

the contribution and growth of the passive-aggressive child's behavior and refrains from making judgements about the behaviors of the child. It develops the child's "We and Us" orientations as opposed to a personal orientation of "I and Me" (p. 51).

To produce changes in observed and measured passive-aggressive behaviors, all behavior modification programs must include attractive rewards to effectively reinforce the target behaviors. Gaugham and Axelrod (1989) reported that appropriate target behaviors increase and disruptive behaviors decrease when appropriate behaviors are reinforced with rewards. It is essential that effective objects, foods, and activities are identified and ordered in a hierarchy to assist parents and teachers to increase the frequency of the appropriate behaviors as reported by Thompson and Fairchild (1985). They suggested several observational methods to identify and order in a hierarchy the preferred items and activities to be used as reinforcers.

One method suggested by Thompson and Fairchild (1985) is to observe the passive-aggressive child in a free-time situation and record the activities he most often chooses to do. A second method is to provide the child with a variety of sample reinforcers and record the reinforcer the child frequently selects. Another method suggested is

that parents and teachers compile a list of reinforcers and ask the child to select those items or activities that appeal to him. The final observational method recommended is to record the effects of a particular item or activity as a reinforcer for specific appropriate behavior.

Thompson and Fairchild (1985) reported that the reinforcer program requires communication with the passive-aggressive child's parents and willingness of parents and teachers to share the responsibility for helping the child develop appropriate behaviors at school. The child will then be rewarded in school and at home for his appropriate behaviors. Rapport and trust between parents and teachers develop as they work together for the sake of the child.

Reinforcers can involve a "token economy plan" (p.141) as reported by Thompson and Fairchild (1985). A token economy plan enables the child to receive tokens for appropriate behaviors. The tokens may be plastic chips, paper clips, stickers, marbles, or tally marks. A specified number of tokens buys the child a reinforcer. They reported that reinforcers need to be priced according to their actual cost and value. More expensive items or activities require more tokens.

Clark and McKenzie (1989) stated that parents and teachers need to be consistent and distribute reinforcers immediately, or the child may revert to his inappropriate

behavior. They stressed that reinforcers lose their effectiveness over time and suggested that the reinforcer list or "menu" (p. 97) be evaluated frequently and new reinforcers be identified and added to the menu. Thompson and Fairchild (1985) reported that constant monitoring of reinforcers by parents and teachers allows minor problems to be quickly and effectively resolved.

The behavior modification programs reported on in this section were selected for their principle of increasing the frequency of appropriate behaviors, reducing the amount of inappropriate disruptive behaviors, and providing reinforcers for on-task behaviors.

The next section of this paper, chapter three, summarizes chapter two, states conclusions based on the review of the literature, and offers recommendations regarding the subject of passive-aggressive behaviors exhibited by children in the elementary grades.

## CHAPTER 3

## Summary

This study was designed to aid parents and teachers with information which could assist them to appropriately deal with and modify the passive-aggressive behavior exhibited by their child and students.

This writer reported on the clinical definition and criteria of the passive-aggressive personality disorder. Significant and problematic behavioral characteristics of the passive-aggressive child were identified and examined. Background factors which appear to create a passive-aggressive child were explored. Characteristics and inappropriate coping techniques manifested by the passive-aggressive personality child were presented. Appropriate coping interventions for parents and teachers to utilize toward a passive-aggressive child were examined.

Finally, effective operative behavior modifications for the child who exhibits the passive-aggressive personality disorder characteristics and traits in the home and classroom were reported on for parents and teachers to effectively break the conflict cycle and power struggle manifested by the passive-aggressive child.

Elementary aged children, six through pre-teen, were the focus of this study. Literature over the past thirteen years was extensively reviewed for presentation in this paper.

The diagnostic criteria and definition for passive-aggressive personality disorder was listed as set forth in the Diagnostic Criteria from the Diagnostic and Statistic Manual-III-R of the American Psychiatric Association. Many children exhibit the behaviors listed, but only when the behaviors interfere with the child's total education program and development do they become significant and problematic.

Researching the probable causes for a child to develop a passive-aggressive personality disorder resulted in unanimity among the authorities. The writer contends that the passive-aggressive child is not born with this personality disorder but learns the behavior from being raised in an environment that creates internal anger and helplessness in the child. This results in an environment in which the passive-aggressive child has no model or permission to appropriately display his internal anger or cope with his helplessness. The passive-aggressive child is nurtured by overcontrolling and overdemanding parents to become angry but is never taught how to appropriately direct this anger. Often the child is not given sufficient

positive attention.

Since the passive-aggressive child is an extension of his successful middle-class parents' beliefs and values, the parents desire their child to be well liked, accepted, valued and "good". The child is taught not only to be "good", to get along easily with others, have nice thoughts, nice behavior and never think or speak in negative terms, but he is sent an early clear message that he is special.

Often the passive-aggressive child is raised with punishment, hollering, and threats within the "Power-Struggle Game" played sufficiently hard between the "Persecutors" (parents) and the "Victim" (child). Unfortunately, the appropriate nurturing qualities of love, affection, and attention are denied the passive-aggressive child within the "Power-Struggle Game."

Raised within anger and unhappiness, the only gratification for the passive-aggressive child is derived from angering, upsetting, frustrating, disappointing, or shocking his parents or teachers.

Due to his "specialness" and his sense of blamelessness and superiority, the passive-aggressive child is in a constant battle for control of every situation. One of the characteristics exhibited by the child is his amazing



ability to turn around fault and guilt. He will wear down others, work on their guilt, and employ legalistic strategies regarding his rights, freedoms, and privileges, yet never mention his responsibilities.

Perseverance is another characteristic of the passive-aggressive child. Through intimidations, arguments, and nitpicking, he seizes on any inconsistency and minor point which he can enlarge into a major dispute and wear down the other person.

Another prominent behavior of the passive-aggressive child is stubbornness. This is exhibited through pouting, sulking, withdrawing, walking away, forgetting, and not knowing. Yet the child will never admit to losing any confrontation.

The passive-aggressive child views life as an ongoing battle between himself and the world. To maintain his fragile self-esteem and to win, he resorts to arguments, excuse making, and silence as a means to control this ongoing battle. Winning at all cost is his objective. He will never admit to losing.

The passive-aggressive child is his own worst enemy. His inappropriate ways of dealing with his anger lead him on a degenerative course of more unhappiness.

Having identified the characteristics of a passive-

aggressive child, parents and teachers now have the monumental and crucial task of utilizing appropriate coping interventions. The researcher found the following specific coping interventions to be applicable.

[Request a specific action from the passive-aggressive child by stating your position concisely, clearly, directly, calmly, and then quit. Well defined consequences for non-action are to be explained calmly in advance.]

Since the child refuses to accept consequences for his chosen behavior, parents and teachers are encouraged to refuse responsibility or guilt for the child's behavior. Parents and teachers act as a resource but do not do the task for the passive-aggressive child or mediate for him.

Patience, ignoring, and outwaiting the child are other essential coping devices suggested to effectively intervene with the child's ability to trigger guilt reactions within parents and teachers. Ignoring is absolutely the worst form of discipline imaginable to a passive-aggressive child. Even negative attention is better than being completely ignored.

Removal of the adult's negative emotional responses of becoming upset, frustrated, shocked, or disappointed was encouraged. These responses only reward the passive-aggressive child for his behaviors and enable the behaviors

to continue. When the child learns that he inconveniences only himself through his behaviors, he will no longer be motivated to continue doing them.

Finally, parents and teachers need to learn the passive-aggressive child's predictable sequences of inappropriate behaviors and intervene early in the sequence before a crisis develops. To ask what is wrong or to apologize is to mollify the passive-aggressive child.

For parents and teachers to alter the passive-aggressive behavior displayed by the child, various effective behavior modification programs were presented.

Before any behavior can be changed, the important behavioral problems or "target behaviors" of the passive-aggressive child need to be observed, pinpointed in precise categories, and reliably counted and measured. Once identified, one or several of the recommended effective behavior modification programs can be applied to alter the problem behavior.

A passive-aggressive child may have forgotten or was never taught what are acceptable behaviors in the home or school. For learning to occur, age-appropriate social skills have to be taught to the child. Once taught, a simple reminder stated calmly along with a brief explanation may be adequate to focus the child toward an

appropriate social skill.

One technique suggested to socialize a passive-aggressive child was the use of "proximity control." This strategy requires the teacher to maintain a close distance to the child whereby the teacher walks by the child in a non-controlling manner, maintains eye contact with the rest of the class, but not with the passive-aggressive child, until the appropriate behavior is obtained and maintained.

Through peer modeling and class discussions the child will slowly learn how normal and acceptable it is to have feelings of anger. He will learn how beneficial it is to talk about his anger rather than acting it out or repressing it.

Talking to the passive-aggressive child about appropriate behavior is not sufficient. The significant adults need to help the child learn to be caring and responsible in class and the home by giving the child frequent opportunities to act on the values being taught. This can be accomplished through "cooperative activities", "positive examples", and "developmental discipline".

Several strategies were presented to help strengthen a passive-aggressive child's fragile self-esteem. To accomplish this the adult-child interactions have to be positive, validating, affirming, and encouraging. The

child needs to identify and focus on positive successful aspects of his life and learn to replace negative thoughts with positive self-talk. Praise statements should be changed to encouragement declarations.

To produce changes in observed and measured passive-aggressive behaviors, all behavior modification programs must include attractive rewards to effectively reinforce the target behaviors.

A hierarchy of preferred items, foods, and activities to be used as reinforcers needs to be identified and ordered to produce changes in the passive-aggressive behaviors. Reinforcers can involve a "token economy plan" which enables the child to receive tokens such as plastic chips, paper clips, stickers, or tally marks for appropriate behaviors. A specific number of tokens buys the child a reinforcer of his choice.

#### Conclusion

Having researched the causes and characteristics of the passive-aggressive child exhaustively and extensively, the writer concludes that the topic has been adequately and effectively researched. The related studies, articles, and papers presented unanimity as to a passive-aggressive child's being raised in an environment that taught him this

debilitated behavior. Characteristics exhibited by this troubled child are many yet comparable and predictable.

There was consensus among the authorities regarding the complexity of effective and appropriate coping interventions for parents and educators toward a passive-aggressive child. The research provided various interventions and approaches yet it focused on the same goals. There was little deviation in the research regarding effective behavior modification programs except for alternative approaches.

Since a passive-aggressive personality is learned, parents in particular must be cognitive of their behaviors and interactions with their child so as not to nurture and enable this behavior. Teachers must be conscious and sensitive to the manifested characteristics of the passive-aggressive child in their environment. They must be knowledgeable of the various effective behavior management programs available and willing to patiently and persistently implement them.

The coping interventions and behavior modifications presented by this writer can be beneficial and effective in altering many other undesired behaviors exhibited at home or in the classroom. The objective of every parent and teacher should optimistically be to nurture a socially and

academically healthy child. The researcher has presented several tested and proven approaches to obtain this covetable goal.

#### Recommendations

The writer feels the topic regarding the causes and characteristics of the passive-aggressive personality and various effective behavior modification programs have been adequately researched. The various causes for nurturing a passive-aggressive child were studied and documented. The multitude of manifested behavioral characteristics were identified and listed. Ample behavior modification programs are available.

No further research in this area is suggested by the writer. However, the author offers a recommendation for more effective use of these findings presented in this paper.

The researcher's intended audience is parents and teachers since they are significant and instrumental in molding a young child's future. The task before them is monumental and complex.

It is the writer's recommendation that parents and teachers step back and objectively observe every child in their care. Be sensitive to the individual child's needs.

Be patient in your interactions with each child. Take time to earn the child's trust. State criticisms calmly, kindly, yet firmly. Remember to be consistent in your expectations and requests. Most importantly, let the child know that you love and care for him.



## References

- Anderson, D.W. (1988, March). Teachers touching students. The Education Digest, pp. 54-55.
- ✓ Asarnow, J.R., & Bates, S. Depression in child psychiatric inpatients: cognitive and attribution patterns. Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology, 16, 601-615.
- ( Barnes, C. M. (1991, February). Passive-aggressive behavior (oppositional, negativistic). Paper presented at an In-Service for Fond du Lac Public School Staff.
- Bassoff, E.S. (1984). Healthy aspects of passivity and gendlin's focusing. The Personnel and Guidance Journal, 1, 268-270.
- ( Berres, M., & Long, N. J. (1979). The passive-aggressive child. The Pointer, 23(3), 27-31.
- Bullock, J. (1988, November). Altering aggression in young children. The Education Digest, pp.44-47.
- ( Bowen, M. (1977). The passive-aggressive personality: a look at failure, self-destruction, loneliness, and hidden anger. (Available from: The Counseling Center, Inc., 1718 Main Street, Marinette, WI 54143).
- Broom, S. A. (1989, April). The magic kids: A strategy to build self-esteem and change attitudes toward the handicapped. Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the Council for Exceptional Children, San Francisco, CA.

- Burkholder, L. (1983, April). Affective management strategies for behavior disordered students - elementary and secondary levels. Paper presented at the Annual International Convention of The Council for Exceptional Children, Detroit, MI.
- ✓ Buckholdt, D., & Gubrium, J. (1980) The underlife of behavior modification. American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 50(2), 279-290.
- Burke, J. (1988) Out of the classroom - into the street applying classroom management techniques during crisis. CPI National Report, pp. 15-21.
- Canfield, J. (1990, September). Improving students' self-esteem. Educational Leadership, pp. 48-50.
- Clark, L., & McKenzie, H. S. (1989). Effects of self-evaluation training of seriously emotionally disturbed children on the generalization of their classroom rule following and work behaviors across settings and teachers. Behavior Disorders, 14(2), 89-98.
- Cole, M. (1984). How to make a person passive-aggressive or the power struggle game. Transactional Analysis Journal, 14, 191-194.
- Davidhizar, R. E. (1983, Summer). Managing the passive-aggressive student nurse. Nurse Educator, pp. 34-35.

- Gaughan, E., & Axelrod, S. (1989). Behavior and achievement relationships with emotionally disturbed children: an applied study. Psychology in the Schools, 26(1), 89-98.
- George, N. L., George, M. P., & Grosenick, J. K. (1989), Measuring the success of programs for seriously emotionally disturbed students. The Pointer, 33(4), 12-14.
- Hardy, J. (1988). How passive-aggressive behavior in emotionally disturbed children affects peer interactions in a classroom setting. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 297 518).
- Kauffman, J. M., Dullinan, D., & Epstein, M. H. (1987, May). Characteristics of students placed in special programs for the seriously emotionally disturbed. Behavior Disorders, pp. 175-183.
- Kay, M. (1986, September). Overcoming passive behavior. Academic Therapy, pp. 35-39.
- Klotz, M. E. (1987). Development of a behavior management level system. The Pointer, 31(2), 5-11.
- Kreger, R. D., & Kreger, L. R. (1988). Helping emotionally disturbed children deal with the separation process. The Pointer, 33(3), 4-6.

- Landfried, S. E. (1989, November). "Enabling" undermines responsibility in students. Educational Leadership, pp. 79-83.
- Madden, L. (1988, September). Teacher communication and student self-esteem. The Education Digest, pp.50-53.
- (O'Loughlin, D. (1984, April). The role of the father in the development and treatment of childhood disturbances. Paper presented at the meeting of the Southwestern Psychological Association, New Orleans, LA.
- Riester, A. E. (1984). Teaching the emotionally disturbed student. The Pointer, 28(3), 13-18.
- Perry, J. C., & Flannery, R. B. (1982). Passive-aggressive personality disorder: treatment implications of a clinical typology. The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease, 170(1), 164-173.
- (Petty, R. (1989, March). Managing disruptive students. Educational Leadership, pp. 26-28.
- Streshly, W., & Schaps, E. (1989, March). Teaching character development. The Education Digest, pp. 25-28.
- Thompson, C. L., & Fairchild, T. (1985, December). A home-school token economy plan. School Guidance and Counseling, pp. 141-146.

West, P. (1989). The basic essentials: protective behaviors anti-victimization and empowerment process.

Wisconsin: Protective Behaviors, Inc.

White, F. B. (1984). The special it: The passive-aggressive personality part I. Transactional Analysis Journal, 14(1), 124-130.