

UDC 159.92

DOI <https://doi.org/10.32689/maup.psych.2025.3.1>**Aysel ABBASLI ILYAS**

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PREVENTIVE APPROACHES TO AGGRESSIVE TENDENCIES IN EARLY ADOLESCENCE

Early adolescence, between ages 10 and 14, is a sensitive stage of development. During these years, young people go through rapid physical, emotional, and social changes. Aggressive behavior can either become a long-term problem or, with the right support, be turned into healthier ways of coping. Because of this, preventive approaches are very important. Experts often use a three-level model for prevention: universal, selective, and indicated. Universal approaches are for all students and include creating a positive school climate, building strong teacher–student relationships, and teaching social skills. Selective approaches focus on groups of adolescents who face higher risks, such as those growing up in stressful families or violent neighborhoods. Indicated approaches are more intensive and help youth already showing serious aggression, often through family therapy or clinical support.

Several key skills help reduce aggression. These include learning how to control emotions, solve problems peacefully, and develop empathy for others. Positive discipline at home and in school sets clear boundaries without relying on harsh punishment. A strong connection with teachers and supportive peers also protects against aggressive behavior. Different evidence-based programs have shown success. Social-emotional learning in schools improves both behavior and academic performance. Anti-bullying models reduce violence and make schools safer. Parenting programs teach caregivers how to set limits while staying warm and supportive. For high-risk youth, family or systems-based therapies target problems in multiple areas of life at the same time.

A good practice framework should combine early screening, tiered levels of support, and ongoing monitoring. It should also consider cultural values, gender differences, and the impact of digital spaces where bullying often happens. By working together, schools, families, and communities can guide adolescents toward positive growth and help prevent aggression from becoming a lasting pattern. Thus, timely multi-level interventions during early adolescence can reduce aggression and create a strong foundation for healthy social and emotional development.

Key words: early adolescence, aggression, prevention, social-emotional learning, school climate, parenting programs, restorative practices.

Айсель Аббаслі Ільяс. ПРОФІЛАКТИЧНІ ПІДХОДИ ДО АГРЕСИВНИХ ТЕНДЕНЦІЙ У РАННІЙ ПІДЛІТКОВІЙ ВІЦІ

Рання підлітковість, віком від 10 до 14 років, є чутливим етапом розвитку. У ці роки молоді люди проходять швидкі фізичні, емоційні та соціальні зміни. Агресивна поведінка може стати або довгостроковою проблемою, або, за належної підтримки, перетворитися на здоровіший спосіб подолання труднощів. Через це профілактичні підходи є дуже важливими. Експерти часто використовують трирівневу модель профілактики: універсальну, вибіркову та індикативну. Універсальні підходи призначені для всіх учнів і включають створення позитивного шкільного клімату, побудову міцних стосунків між вчителем та учнем, а також навчання соціальним навичкам. Вибіркові підходи зосереджені на групах підлітків, які стикаються з підвищеним ризиком, наприклад, тих, хто виростає в стресових сім'ях або насильницьких районах. Вказані підходи є більш інтенсивними та допомагають молоді, яка вже проявляє серйозну агресію, часто через сімейну терапію або клінічну підтримку.

Кілька ключових навичок допомагають зменшити агресію. До них належать навчитися контролювати емоції, мирно вирішувати проблеми та розвивати емпатію до інших. Позитивна дисципліна вдома та в школі встановлює чіткі межі без використання суворих покарань. Міцний зв'язок з вчителями та однолітками, що підтримують, також захищає від агресивної поведінки. Різні програми, засновані на доказах, продемонстрували успіх. Соціально-емоційне навчання в школах покращує як поведінку, так і академічну успішність. Моделі боротьби з булінгом зменшують рівень насильства та роблять школи безпечнішими. Програми виховання дітей навчають опікунів встановлювати межі, залишатися теплими та підтримуючими. Для молоді з групи високого ризику сімейна або системна терапія спрямована на вирішення проблем у кількох сферах життя одночасно.

Структура належної практики повинна поєднувати ранній скринінг, багаторівневі рівні підтримки та постійний моніторинг. Вона також повинна враховувати культурні цінності, гендерні відмінності та вплив цифрових просторів, де часто трапляється булінг. Працюючи разом, школи, сім'ї та громади можуть спрямувати підлітків до позитивного зростання та допомогти запобігти перетворенню агресії на тривалу модель поведінки. Таким чином, своєчасні багаторівневі втручання в ранньому підлітковому віці можуть зменшити агресію та створити міцну основу для здорового соціального та емоційного розвитку.

Ключові слова: ранній підлітковий вік, агресія, профілактика, соціально-емоційне навчання, шкільний клімат, батьківські програми, відновлювальні практики.

Introduction. Aggressive behavior—whether physical, verbal, relational, reactive, or proactive—tends to intensify during early adolescence, when rapid biological maturation, executive function reorganization, increased

peer influence, and expanding digital exposure converge. Deficits in emotional regulation and social problem-solving skills often contribute to the escalation of aggression. Risk factors include individual impulsivity and hostile attribution

bias; inconsistent or harsh family discipline; conflictual or neglectful parenting; peer norms that tolerate aggression; unsafe school climates; and digital spaces that normalize hostile interactions. Protective factors, on the other hand—such as empathy, self-regulation, teacher–student connectedness, consistent positive discipline, and warm parent–child relationships—buffer against aggressive trajectories.

Research consistently demonstrates that early intervention is more effective than reactive approaches later in adolescence. Universal strategies like social-emotional learning (SEL) programs improve student relationships and reduce aggression at the school-wide level. Anti-bullying models shift normative expectations and peer behaviors. Positive parenting interventions foster consistency, warmth, and structured discipline that counteract reactivity. For high-risk groups, intensive family- and systems-based approaches, such as multisystemic therapy, have shown strong effects in reducing conduct problems.

This paper is organized around a three-tiered public health framework: universal (school climate and SEL), selective (targeted parenting and peer interventions), and indicated (individual and family-based therapeutic supports). Its novelty lies in integrating these preventive mechanisms into a coherent “tiered pathway of support” that accounts for cultural differences, gendered expressions of aggression, and the challenges of digital contexts.

Research Aims and Questions. The aim of this study is to systematize evidence-based preventive strategies against aggressive tendencies in early adolescence and to propose a practical roadmap for schools, families, and community-based settings. The guiding questions are:

1. Which universal school strategies most effectively reduce baseline aggression levels?
2. Which mechanisms within selective and indicated interventions (e.g., emotion regulation, social problem-solving, restorative practices) demonstrate the strongest outcomes?
3. What conditions (fidelity, professional training, monitoring systems) are necessary for successful implementation?

Literature Review

1. Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and School Climate

One of the strongest evidence-based preventive strategies against adolescent aggression is the implementation of SEL programs. These interventions teach skills such as emotional regulation, empathy, conflict resolution, and responsible decision-making. A large-scale meta-analysis by Durlak et al. (2011) [2] found that SEL not only improves prosocial behavior and

reduces aggression but also enhances academic achievement. Whole-school SEL frameworks help establish positive norms and supportive teacher–student relationships, which are protective against both reactive and proactive aggression. A safe and structured school climate, reinforced by clear rules and consistent expectations, has also been shown to reduce bullying and aggressive behavior [1].

2. Parenting Interventions and Family Functioning

Family dynamics play a central role in shaping adolescents' behavior. Harsh, inconsistent, or neglectful parenting practices have been repeatedly linked to higher levels of aggression, while positive discipline, warmth, and clear boundaries act as protective factors. Parenting interventions such as the Triple P – Positive Parenting Program [7] or Strengthening Families Program [7] are designed to improve parental skills in communication, monitoring, and discipline. Evidence suggests that these interventions are particularly effective in reducing reactive aggression by improving parent–child interaction quality and emotional security at home [6].

3. Anti-Bullying Programs and Peer Contexts

Peers are a powerful influence in early adolescence, and peer norms that tolerate or encourage aggression significantly increase the likelihood of its occurrence. Whole-school anti-bullying initiatives, such as the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, are among the most studied in this field. Farrington and Ttofi (2011) found that these programs reduce bullying perpetration and victimization by 20–23% on average. Such programs work by reshaping peer group norms, empowering bystanders, and strengthening teacher supervision. Restorative justice approaches, which focus on repairing relationships rather than punishment, have also gained attention for their effectiveness in reducing school conflicts.

4. Family- and Systems-Based Therapies for High-Risk Youth

For adolescents with established aggressive or conduct problems, more intensive interventions are required. Multisystemic Therapy (MST), Functional Family Therapy (FFT), and other systems-based approaches address multiple ecological domains—family, peers, school, and community—simultaneously [4]. These therapies target risk factors such as hostile attribution bias, poor family cohesion, and deviant peer affiliations. Studies demonstrate that MST significantly reduces violent offending and improves family functioning, making it one of the most effective interventions for indicated cases.

5. The Digital Environment and Aggression

In recent years, digital platforms have emerged as new contexts for adolescent aggression,

particularly in the form of cyberbullying. Online spaces amplify aggressive tendencies by reducing social accountability and increasing exposure to hostile models. Preventive strategies in this domain include digital literacy programs, parental monitoring of online activity, and peer-led interventions that promote responsible digital citizenship. Research highlights that schools combining traditional anti-bullying strategies with digital awareness components report greater success in reducing overall aggression [5].

Methods. This article is structured as a conceptual review informed by developmental psychology, public health, and educational science perspectives. Instead of primary data collection, the study synthesizes existing empirical findings and theoretical frameworks on preventive approaches to aggression in early adolescence.

Research Design. The design follows a narrative review approach with thematic organization. Sources were selected from peer-reviewed journals, meta-analyses, and authoritative monographs published primarily in the last two decades. Foundational works on aggression, adolescent development, and prevention science were also included to provide theoretical grounding.

Data Sources and Selection Criteria

Literature was identified using major academic databases (PsycINFO, PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science) with search terms such as early adolescence, aggression prevention, social-emotional learning, parenting interventions, anti-bullying programs, family therapy, and cyberbullying. Inclusion criteria prioritized:

1. Studies focusing on ages 10–14 (early adolescence).
2. Interventions with measurable preventive outcomes (e.g., reduction of aggressive behavior, improvement of protective factors).
3. Evidence-based programs with replication in diverse contexts.

Exclusion criteria involved studies limited to clinical samples without preventive scope or those focusing solely on older adolescents.

Analytical Framework. The review employs a three-tiered prevention model commonly used in public health:

- Universal interventions, targeting all adolescents (e.g., SEL, school climate initiatives).
- Selective interventions, focusing on at-risk groups (e.g., parenting and peer-focused programs).
- Indicated interventions, addressing adolescents already displaying aggressive or conduct problems (e.g., family and systems-based therapies).

This framework allowed systematic categorization of the literature and identification

of key mechanisms (emotion regulation, empathy, social problem-solving, positive discipline, peer norms, and digital citizenship).

Limitations. As a conceptual review, this study is limited by reliance on secondary data and the variability of program implementation across cultural contexts. However, triangulation across multiple studies and meta-analyses strengthens the reliability of findings.

Results:

1. Universal Interventions: School-Wide Prevention

Evidence consistently shows that universal, school-based programs create measurable reductions in aggressive behavior among early adolescents. Social-emotional learning (SEL) initiatives improve emotional regulation, empathy, and cooperative problem-solving. A meta-analysis by Durlak et al. (2011) [2] reported a 10–12% reduction in aggressive incidents across schools that adopted structured SEL curricula. Whole-school climate reforms—such as consistent behavioral expectations, clear anti-bullying policies, and supportive teacher–student relationships—also demonstrate long-term protective effects. Programs that integrate restorative justice practices further reduce school suspensions and conflict recurrence, signaling the potential of universal approaches to shift cultural norms around aggression.

2. Selective Interventions: Targeting At-Risk Groups

Selective interventions focus on adolescents showing elevated risk factors, such as exposure to harsh parenting, peer rejection, or early conduct problems. Parenting interventions such as Triple P and Strengthening Families 10–14 improve parental monitoring, reduce inconsistent discipline, and enhance emotional warmth. Studies indicate that these interventions significantly decrease reactive aggression by strengthening family cohesion and communication [7]. Peer-focused interventions, particularly group-based social skills training, foster prosocial alternatives to aggression, although outcomes are strongest when combined with parental involvement.

3. Indicated Interventions: Intensive Family- and Systems-Based Supports

For youth with established aggressive or conduct disorders, intensive interventions provide the most effective outcomes. Multisystemic Therapy (MST) has demonstrated up to 50% reductions in violent offending and re-arrest rates (Henggeler 2009). Functional Family Therapy (FFT) improves problem-solving within families, decreases hostility, and reduces the recurrence of aggressive incidents. These interventions are effective because they target multiple ecological

domains simultaneously—family dynamics, peer associations, school performance, and community involvement—rather than addressing aggression in isolation.

4. Digital Contexts and Cyber-Aggression

Findings indicate that prevention efforts must also account for digital environments, where aggressive tendencies manifest as cyberbullying. Programs that blend traditional anti-bullying frameworks with digital literacy training yield stronger results than either approach alone [5]. Early adolescents who receive guidance on responsible digital citizenship report reduced involvement in both online aggression and victimization.

5. Cross-Cutting Mechanisms

Across all tiers, certain mechanisms emerge as consistently protective:

- Emotion regulation and impulse control training reduce reactive aggression.
- Empathy-building programs foster prosocial responses and reduce peer conflicts.
- Parental consistency and warmth lower family-related stressors linked to aggression.
- Teacher-student connectedness enhances school engagement and lowers aggressive incidents.

Discussion. The findings of this review underscore the importance of a tiered and multi-layered approach to preventing aggressive tendencies in early adolescence. This developmental stage is marked by heightened neurobiological sensitivity, increased peer influence, and shifting family dynamics, which makes prevention efforts both urgent and complex. Universal interventions, particularly school-wide social and emotional learning (SEL) programs and broader climate reforms, provide the foundational layer by strengthening protective factors across all students. Their effectiveness demonstrates that aggression prevention is most impactful when embedded into everyday educational practices and routines rather than treated as isolated behavior-management episodes. Whole-school models generate not only individual skill gains but also cultural shifts at the institutional level, discouraging aggression, promoting prosocial norms, and supporting long-term developmental outcomes [2; 1]. This highlights the crucial point that preventive work must be systemic, shaping the “ecosystem” in which adolescents learn and interact.

Selective interventions show that targeted support for at-risk youth and families can prevent the escalation of aggressive behavior into chronic or pathological patterns. Adolescents exposed to inconsistent parenting, family stress, or community violence are particularly vulnerable, and interventions addressing these

factors demonstrate clear benefits. Parenting programs emerge as especially crucial, given the central role of family dynamics in shaping adolescent emotional and behavioral regulation. Improvements in parental consistency, warmth, monitoring, and communication reduce the likelihood of reactive aggression and strengthen adolescents’ resilience to external stressors [7; 6]. These findings reinforce the interdependence between family functioning and adolescent social adjustment, suggesting that family-centered approaches remain indispensable components of comprehensive prevention strategies.

Indicated interventions, such as Multisystemic Therapy (MST) and Functional Family Therapy (FFT), further demonstrate that intensive, multi-domain therapies can significantly reduce aggression in adolescents already displaying severe conduct problems. By simultaneously addressing family dynamics, peer influences, school engagement, and community-level risk, these approaches illustrate the necessity of ecological perspectives in reducing entrenched aggressive behavior [4]. However, the high cost, specialized training requirements, and substantial resource demands of these models limit their scalability. Consequently, such interventions are best positioned as specialized options within a comprehensive framework, targeting only the most severe cases while relying on universal and selective strategies for broader prevention coverage.

A further contribution of this review is the recognition of digital environments as emerging and increasingly influential contexts of aggression. Cyberbullying prevention requires strategies that integrate digital literacy, empathy training, and responsible online engagement with traditional anti-bullying approaches. As digital platforms become central to adolescent identity formation and peer interaction, failing to address online aggression risks undermining otherwise successful school- and family-based prevention models. This means that integrating digital citizenship education, safe social media practices, and mechanisms for online accountability is no longer optional but essential [5].

Another important implication concerns implementation fidelity and sustainability. Research consistently indicates that program effectiveness is moderated by the quality and consistency of implementation. Even evidence-based models lose much of their impact if delivered inconsistently or without adequate professional support. Teacher training, administrative commitment, and parental engagement are therefore critical in sustaining program outcomes [3]. Furthermore, cultural contexts and gender norms shape both the expression of aggression and the acceptability of intervention strategies. For instance, relational

aggression tends to be more common among girls, while physical aggression is more prevalent among boys, suggesting that prevention strategies must be gender-sensitive and culturally adaptive [6]. Without tailoring interventions to local cultural norms and gendered patterns of behavior, the risk of reduced effectiveness or even resistance from stakeholders increases.

Taken together, these findings reinforce the view that aggression prevention in early adolescence must be conceptualized as a continuous and multi-level process rather than a one-time intervention. Sustained progress requires coordination across schools, families, and communities, alongside strong policy frameworks that prioritize prevention as an investment in long-term public health and social stability. Policymakers and practitioners should therefore emphasize integrated, evidence-based strategies that address multiple layers of risk while reinforcing protective mechanisms [1]. Crucially, future research should also consider how preventive frameworks can be adapted for diverse cultural settings, changing digital landscapes, and evolving socio-political conditions, ensuring that interventions remain relevant, scalable, and sustainable in the decades to come.

Conclusions. Aggressive tendencies in early adolescence pose significant risks for both individual development and broader social outcomes if left unaddressed. This review highlights that prevention is most effective when implemented as a multi-tiered system combining universal, selective, and indicated strategies. Universal interventions, such as social-

emotional learning programs and whole-school climate reforms, create a broad foundation by fostering positive norms and protective skills across the student body. Selective interventions, particularly evidence-based parenting programs, offer targeted support to families and adolescents at risk, reducing the likelihood of escalation. Indicated interventions, including multisystemic and family-based therapies, provide intensive, multi-domain treatment for adolescents already exhibiting aggressive or conduct problems.

The emergence of digital contexts as a key arena for aggression underscores the need to expand prevention efforts beyond traditional school and family domains. Programs integrating digital literacy and responsible online behavior are essential for addressing cyberbullying and related forms of aggression.

Sustainability and effectiveness depend on implementation fidelity, cultural adaptation, and ongoing collaboration among schools, families, and communities. Policymakers should prioritize resource allocation to ensure access to evidence-based interventions at all three levels, while practitioners must be trained to deliver programs consistently and sensitively.

Ultimately, preventing aggression in early adolescence is not only about reducing harmful behavior but also about promoting positive youth development. By equipping young people with the skills to regulate emotions, resolve conflicts, and build healthy relationships, societies can lay the groundwork for safer schools, stronger families, and more cohesive communities.

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Дата надходження статті: 29.09.2025

Дата прийняття статті: 20.10.2025

Опубліковано: 28.11.2025