
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

Is aggression useful?



NB: This is not a word-for-word transcript

Neil

Hello and welcome to 6 Minute English. I'm Neil...

Catherine

... and I'm Catherine. Hello.

Neil

Hello, Catherine! I want to know, what sort of things make you feel angry?

Catherine

Many things make me feel angry, Neil. But one thing that makes me regularly angry is when people put the wrong rubbish in the wrong bins.

Neil

Yes, that makes me angry too.

Catherine

Does it?

Neil

It's not very thoughtful, is it?

Catherine

Not really, no.

Neil

So, you may feel angry about people putting rubbish in the wrong bin but do you get **aggressive**? That's behaving in an angry way, looking like you want to argue or even fight with someone?

Catherine

No. I don't really get aggressive about wheelie bins, to be honest.

Neil

Well I tend to control my anger too and keep calm but I have been known to react - especially if someone is damaging some of my property.

Catherine

Wow. Really?

Neil

Yeah. I can't stand it. It comes **out of the blue** – it's completely unexpected. But I'm glad to say I feel quite calm today.

Catherine

I'm glad to hear it, Neil. But today we are talking about aggression and we'll look at what we can learn about human aggression by some examples from the animal kingdom.

Neil

That's right. Now, are you ready to answer today's quiz question, Catherine?

Catherine

In a very calm and non-aggressive way, I would like you to give me the question.

Neil

When attacked, what does a baboon typically do to show aggression? Does it...

a) beat its chest?

b) yawn and show its teeth?

or c) laugh and roll on the ground?

Catherine

Well... I'd love to think of an angry baboon laughing and rolling on the ground. But I'm going to go for b) yawn and show its teeth.

Neil

OK. Well, we'll see if you right or wrong a bit later on. Now, Catherine, how do you usually act when you're angry or upset about something?

Catherine

I generally let people know how I feel to be honest. I don't go over the top and hit people, but also I don't sulk about things. And **sulk** means when you refuse to smile or speak because you want to let people know you are upset about something.

Neil

Sulking is quite childish, isn't it Catherine?

Catherine

It is. Are you a sulker, Neil?

Neil

I don't sulk, I don't think. But as I said I don't often get angry. I'm a very well balanced and grounded person, Catherine.

Catherine

Really, very good. I'm pleased to hear it, Neil. Anyway, **well balanced** means sensible and in control of your emotions. And **grounded** means mentally and emotionally stable. Is that what you're saying, Neil?

Neil

Yes, that's me. But let's listen to Professor Simon Underdown talking about human behaviour. Can you spot a phrase that means 'the opposite side to an idea'?

INSERT

Simon Underdown, principal lecturer in human evolution at Oxford Brookes University

One of the things humans are incredibly good at doing is being psychologists. We're very good at reading situations that we find ourselves in [...] We're extremely good at picking up on signals. What we can then do is trigger the appropriate response. If it's an empathetic response we may well need to then be sympathetic, we maybe need to show our sort of fluffy side if you want. But on the flipside from an evolutionary point of view the reason we are so successful and we're still here is because we can, and when we need to, react aggressively to situations.

Neil

Did you spot the phrase? **Flipside** means the opposite side to an idea. And being aggressive is the flipside of being fluffy and sympathetic.

Catherine

Fluffy, by the way, is an adjective we often use to describe soft animal fur or feathers on young animals or soft toys for children. But here fluffy means behaviour that is soft and unthreatening so it's the opposite of aggressive.

Neil

And if you are **empathetic** you are able to share or understand another person's feelings. That sounds like me! I'm an excellent empathizer, aren't I, Catherine?

Catherine

Neil, you are absolutely totally full of ... empathy.

Neil

Nice pause.

Catherine

Thank you.

Neil

Now, Simon also talks about humans being good at **reading situations**. What does that mean, Catherine?

Catherine

It means understanding what's going on. For example, if a male gorilla is screaming and breaking branches, other gorillas will probably see this as a show of aggression.

Neil

The male gorilla screams and breaks branches, signalling to the other gorillas that he's angry or upset. **Signal** here means a noise or a movement that gives someone information.

Catherine

And the male gorilla's signal **triggers a response** from the other gorillas. This means one thing causes another thing to happen.

Neil

And when a man suddenly punches another man in the face, what signal does that send?

Catherine

Well, I think for me that would be a signal to leave!

Neil

Yes. Quickly.

Catherine

Yes, indeed. And humans usually give signals just like the gorillas do, before they start a fight. So people might shout, or gesture with their arms. And a **gesture** is a movement made with arms or head to give someone else information. Now then, Neil. Let's have our quiz question answer please.

Neil

OK, OK, stop waving your arms around. So I asked: When attacked, what does a baboon typically do to show aggression? Does it...a) beat its chest? b) yawn and show its teeth? or c) laugh and roll on the ground?

Catherine

And I said b).

Neil

That's right. Well done! Now let's hear today's words once again.

Catherine

They are:

out of the blue

aggressive

sulk

well balanced

grounded

flipside

fluffy

empathetic

reading situations

signal

triggers a response

gesture

Neil

Well, that's the end of today's 6 Minute English. I hope you felt it was a well-balanced show! Check out more programmes at bbclearningenglish.com. Join us again soon.

Both

Bye.

Vocabulary

out of the blue

completely unexpected

aggressive

behaving in an angry way, looking like you want to argue or even fight with someone

sulk

refuse to smile or speak in order to let people know you are upset about something

well balanced

sensible and in control of your emotions

grounded

mentally and emotionally stable

flip side

opposite side to an idea

fluffy

behaviour that is soft and unthreatening – the opposite of aggressive.

empathetic

able to share or understand another person's feelings

reading situations

understanding and interpreting what's going on

signal

(here) making a sound, noise or movement to express your feelings

triggers a response

makes one thing cause other things to happen

gesture

movement you make with your arms or head to give someone information