Case Study:

**The Social Information Processing Model**

**Sideline!**

Twelve-year-old Aiden loved soccer. That’s why it was sheer torture for him to miss even a minute of recess. All morning long, he waited for the chance to escape his classroom and run to the field outside his school to play during lunchtime. Unfortunately, today Aiden was late for recess because he had “lunch duty” and it was his responsibility to make sure the tables were clean after everyone had eaten.

When he was finished, Aiden dashed to the soccer field. Dismayed, he discovered that the other boys had already started and were in the middle of a close game.

“Which team should I be on?” Aiden asked one of the boys.

The boy responded curtly, “Neither. Take a seat.”

Another boy said, “Yeah. The game’s too close.” Several other boys snickered and then ran off after the ball.

Aiden felt a rush of warmth spread from the middle of his chest to the center of his face. He didn’t know exactly how he felt. Was it pain? Disappointment? Rejection? Anger? Whatever the feeling, it was not good and Aiden knew he needed to do something about it.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Identify the six main components of Crick and Dodge’s (1994, 1996) social-information processing model.

   This model is presented in the text and reproduced below. The stages include (1) encoding cues, (2) interpreting cues, (3) clarifying goals, (4) response access, (5) response decision, and (6) behavioral enactment and peer evaluation.
2. If Aiden was a boy with a history of **reactive aggression**, what sort of biases might he show in his social information processing?

Children who engage in reactive aggression tended to have hostile attributional biases for others’ behaviors. Specifically, they exhibit biased problems solving steps (1) encoding cues and (2) interpreting cues. In step 1, Aiden might focus chiefly on his negative emotions (internal cues) or the other boys’ negative words or expressions (external cues). In step 2, Aiden might believe that the boys were excluding him from the game to deliberately be hurtful or because they do not like him. Aiden might not pay attention to alternative causes for the boys’ behavior. For example, perhaps the boys did not want him to join because the game was close and Aiden might make the teams unbalanced or unfair if he joined the game. Alternatively, perhaps the boys’ actions were hurtful because they were angry about losing the game, and not because they disliked Aiden.

3. If Aiden was a boy with a history of **proactive aggression**, what sort of biases might he show in his social information processing?

Children who engage in proactive aggression often show biased problem solving in steps 3 through 5. In step 3 (clarifying goals), Aiden might immediately identify an aggressive goal for the social dilemma. For example, he might impulsively decide that he wants to
“get even” with the boys for being mean to him or excluding him from the game. An alternative, non-aggressive goal might be for Aiden to “remain friends” with boys by being patient. Perhaps they will let him join the game later.

In step 4 (response access), Aiden might have difficulty generating or recalling several possible ways to respond in this social situation. Instead, he might be able to generate only one or two possible solutions and these solutions will likely be aggressive in nature (i.e., yell, shove, hit). The ability to generate possible solutions partially depends on Aiden’s “database for social interactions,” that is, his history of interpersonal dilemmas. If he has seldom seen or used prosocial methods to solve problems in the past, it is unlikely that he will be able to access prosocial methods to solve this current social dilemma.

In step 5 (response decision), Aiden will likely select an aggressive course of action. Many children with histories of proactive aggression over-estimate the reinforcement and under-estimate the punishment that aggressive actions bring.

4. After Aiden enacts his solution to this social problem, how does the social information-processing model repeat itself?

According to Crick and Dodge (1994, 1996), after Aiden enacts his solution to the social dilemma, his peers will respond to his behavior. For example, the other boys might make fun of Aiden, ignore him, or allow him to join the game after all. Their behavior, in turn, provides a new set of cues that must be encoded, interpreted, and responded to—setting the model in motion again.

5. If you were Aiden’s therapist, how might you use Problem-Solving Skills Training (PSST) to help him avoid conflicts with peers?

In PSST, the therapist teaches children the social problem-solving steps in order to (1) avoid hostile attributional biases and (2) generate and select more prosocial solutions. The problem-solving steps include:

• What am I supposed to do?
• What are all my possibilities?
• I’d better concentrate and focus in.
• I need to make a choice.
• Evaluate: I did a good job or I made a mistake.

He text provides an illustration of how these steps might be used in treatment.

Reference: