

Questions & Answers about aggression

When playing with others, young children may get upset easily because they are learning language and social skills. When children can't use words to say what they feel, they may hit, bite, or act out in other ways. Parents can stop children from misbehaving by helping them learn positive ways to deal with problems.

1. What should I do if my daughter hits another child?

Stay calm and act quickly. First, tend to the child who has been hit or bitten. Then calmly and firmly tell your daughter that she can be upset, but she can't hit or bite because it hurts others. Give both children comforting hugs and then find them quiet things to do so that they can calm down. Wait a few minutes, and then talk with your daughter about what upset her. Help her think of better ways to show her feelings in the future. A hug will show your child that you still love her, even though you didn't like her behavior.

You can also use logical consequences. If your child hits another child with a toy, take the toy away for a while. This might also be a good time to say that if she is mean to other children,

the other children will not want to play with her.

2. What should I do if the hitting continues?

If your child won't stop hitting, watch to see when and why this happens. Does your child act out when playing with one child or a group of children? When the child is tired or hungry? How do changes affect your child? These might be changes like a new sibling, divorce, or when the child first gets to school.

Watch for signs that your child is getting angry and take action to stop it. Gently but firmly remove him or her from the situation and to another activity.

3. If my child hits me, should I hit him back? *Never* hit your child because he

hits you. This teaches children that being physical is okay.

4. What can I do to stop aggressive behavior in my child?

There are several ways that parents can stop their children from being aggressive:

- Share feelings in words. Teach children that it is okay to be upset, but help them find positive ways to share their feelings.

It is not okay to hurt others.

Encourage children to use their words. For children who are too young, help them find other ways to get their feelings out.

For example, you might show an angry child an activity using clay. You might say to the child,

"Sometimes when I feel upset, I like to squeeze the clay with my fingers." For a child who is upset over another child not sharing a toy, you might show him another activity saying, *"Sometimes when I cannot do exactly what I want, I find something else I really like to do."*

- Learn problem-solving skills. Teach children how to solve their problems instead of hitting or biting other children. For instance, if two children both want the same toy, they can take turns, or they can put the toy

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away and then each choose different toys.

■ Learn to seek help. Teach children when to ask a parent or other adult for help with a problem. You can tell children, *“If you feel like hitting, please come tell me. I will help you find another way to solve your problem.”* As children get older, encourage them to solve problems with your help. You might say to a preschool age child, *“Francis is playing with your favorite truck. What do you think you should do?”* If the child gives good ideas, such as asking Francis to share, or finding another activity until it’s her turn with the truck, then you can praise her efforts. *“Amy, those are some great ideas!”* Help her follow through with them.

■ Develop empathy. Help children see how their aggression hurts others. *“Marta is crying because it hurt when you bit her hand.”* *“Theo doesn’t want to play with you right now. He did not like it when you threw your toy at him.”*

■ Praise positive behavior. Praise children as they learn to share and play with other children, and as they try to cope with being upset. Other positive behaviors to look for include being patient, sharing with other children, or showing that they are aware of other people’s needs. When children show signs of learning positive social behavior, be sure to tell them that you are proud of them! *“Anthony, you did a great job of sharing the crayons.”* *“Anna*

Maria, I am glad you used your words to tell me how you felt.”

■ Model good behavior. Parents are positive role models for their children when they practice non-aggressive ways to deal with problems. These parents also use constant and supportive parenting methods.

■ Limit exposure to aggression. Parents can keep children from seeing aggressive images on television, in movies, and in books. Parents can also make a rule not to buy aggressive video games and toys.

Sources:

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