

Aggressive children express things physically

Parents can help them communicate with words instead of actions

Some children seem like they are always angry! They pinch, hit, or bite themselves or other children. Why do young children behave aggressively?

When children are aggressive, they are actually communicating with their bodies. They don't have the verbal skills to express their feelings of frustration and anger, so those feelings tend to come out physically. For example:

- When children are unable to do what parents expect, they may feel rejected or misunderstood.

- When children become involved in conflict, they may feel anger that they don't know how to channel.

- Children with low self-esteem or difficulties with sensory processing may misunderstand social cues and react aggressively.

Children may act aggressively when the environment is not a good match for their needs.

- When children feel stressed,

crowded, tired, thirsty, hungry, or experience high noise levels, they may feel anxious or overwhelmed.

- An environment that is disorganized or chaotic, with too few or too many play choices, may cause stress in children.

- Schedules and routines that require children to sit and wait for too long or involve frequent transitions (changes), may lead children to lose control.

- If young children are not closely supervised, conflicts may escalate to the point of aggression.

Young children don't have a real sense of how their actions affect others. When we point out that little Johnny is now crying because he was hit with the toy truck, the child isn't able to understand how the child feels. It will take many simple explanations, and more life experience, before the truth that is so obvious to us — that when you hit someone, they feel the way you would if you were hit — is obvious

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PARENTING POINTS

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Parents can help children learn how to recognize aggressive feelings and to behave in a more socially acceptable ways.

- Teach children the difference between feelings and actions. Young children often act on what they feel. Tell children, "It is okay to feel angry, but it is not okay to hurt people."

- Teach and model appropriate social and play skills. Show them how to join a small group of

children already in play and how to share a toy.

- When things get out of hand, it is important that parents show their disapproval in a calm, friendly way. Try removing the child from the setting or redirecting the activity.

- Limit children's exposure to aggressive acts on television, in movies, or other media sources. Young children have trouble knowing the difference between reality and fantasy. They may imitate what they see and not understand that the aggressive things they are exposed to can cause suffering in real life.

Parents can help children learn how to manage their feelings.

- Provide concrete, consistent, age-appropriate activities that match children's abilities.

- Demonstrate and model appropriate behaviours and words that children can use in conflict situation, such as, "I don't like that," or "I need a turn."

- Offer alternative ways to express intense feelings, like using puppets, painting, using play dough, or making a collage showing pictures of emotions.

- Learn how differences in children's individual rhythms, communication styles, and sensory needs can affect their social interactions.

Vigilance is essential. If you worry your child is likely to hit or bite another child, stay close by and watch her, so you can intervene before she connects. Pay attention, too, to the kinds of situations that get her overexcited. Maybe she may relate better to other children in a park rather than in a crowded play room, in a one-on-one situation, or if free play is interspersed with quiet, adult-led activities like reading stories or drawing with sidewalk chalk. Every successful experience in getting along with others, and every example she sees of "gentle" play, will also help. So will time.

It is not easy for young children to control their feelings. They tend to hit or punch when they're upset, because they don't know a better way to get what they need. Children need a calm parent to steer them back onto the road of developing self-control and handling their frustrations with words instead of actions.