



## physical aggression

when toddlers use physical aggression (e.g., hitting, biting, hair pulling), they are actually trying to communicate. usually, they want something but lack the self-control and intellectual maturity to think of alternate ways of getting it.

a major task of toddlerhood is to learn methods for handling frustration and anger more appropriately. as parents, our job is to help our toddlers learn how to regulate their emotions and behavior.

- **respond immediately.** stop the behavior quickly, firmly and simply.
- **use simple statements like “hitting hurts,” and “we don’t hit.”**
- **if possible, intercede before your child resorts to physical aggression.** intervene as soon as you see your child becoming frustrated or angry. help her label her feelings and try to talk to her about why she’s feeling this way. if she’s too upset, redirect her attention to another activity until she’s calmer.
- **give your toddler a time-out.** in general, the rule of thumb is 1 minute of time-out for every year of your child’s life. however, shorter time-outs for toddlers (ranging from 10-30 seconds) are sufficient and just as effective. tell him that he can re-join the group when he’s ready. this lets him know that he’s responsible for his own behavior.
- **teach alternative communication strategies.** help your child learn to “use words” to express his anger and frustration, instead of biting.
- **turn your attention toward good behavior.** catch your child being good and give her lots of attention when she isn’t misbehaving, and not when she is.
- **focus attention on the victim instead of the aggressor, who often gets the spotlight.**
- **tie your child’s actions to his “victim’s” feelings.** let him know that his actions affect others.



- **teach problem-solving skills.** use role playing to help your child learn problem solving resolution skills. teach him how to use his words, walk away, or ask another adult for help.
- **remove your child from a situation where he just can't control himself.** let him try again another day.
- **use "no" when it really counts.** "no" has a lot more power when it is used sparingly and for things that really matter.
- **don't lose control.** by getting angry, you're not teaching your child how to manage her emotions. she'll be watching how you handle your own anger and frustration. if you freak out, she'll be more intrigued by your reaction, and will likely do the aggressive behavior again, just to get the same response.

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