

HITTING, BITING, PUSHING, AND SHOVING | HOW TO HANDLE YOUR CHILD'S AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR

Presented By: North Shore Pediatric Therapy

As a parent, it can be both frustrating and upsetting when dealing with a child who is exhibiting aggressive behaviors. Parents may feel that they cannot enroll their child in certain activities and/or groups because they fear that their child will be aggressive towards the other children. Also, some parents might even feel worried or embarrassed about receiving phone calls from daycare or school, reporting the aggressive behaviors that their child displayed.

STEP 1: ADDRESSING YOUR CHILD'S BEHAVIOR:

The first step to addressing your child's aggressive behaviors is figuring out why your child is acting like this. A child can become aggressive for several different reasons.

SOME CHILDREN MAY EXHIBIT AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIORS BECAUSE OF:

- Insufficient speech development
- Lack of routine
- Being in a stressful situation
- Feeling over-stimulated
- Seeking attention or a desired item
- Trying to escape or avoid certain situations
- Copying other children's behaviors and actions

Once you have a better understanding on why your child is engaging in aggression, you will be better able to help your child identify more appropriate and non-aggressive ways to work through and solve their problems. Parents need to make sure to address aggressive behaviors and have their children learn and understand that aggressive behaviors are unacceptable and that there are more appropriate ways to express themselves.

STRATEGIES TO TRY WHEN YOUR CHILD IS BEING AGGRESSIVE:

- **Respond Immediately** – After a child exhibits an aggressive behavior, make sure that you address the behavior right then and there. You do not want to let time pass to attend to the problem but rather catch the child in the act and give the appropriate consequence for his/her action. By immediately addressing the problem at hand, the child becomes aware that he/she did something wrong. For example, as soon as little Johnnie pulls his sister's hair for the first time, it should be addressed and he should have to take a timeout. By taking a brief timeout, this can help the child calm down and help him/her connect his/her behavior with the consequence.



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- **Be Consistent** – You want to make sure that you are very consistent on how you are addressing the child's aggressive behaviors; be it at home or in the community. By keeping your response the same, your child will learn and expect what the consequence is for misbehaving. By remaining consistent when addressing aggressive behavior, the child will start to understand that if he/she acts out aggressively, he/she will need to fulfill the consequence for misbehaving.
- **Implement Realistic Consequences** – Make sure that the consequence the child needs to fulfill is realistic and acceptable for the inappropriate behavior he/she exhibited. If the child is pushing peers on the playground, have the child sit out and watch the peers play for a little. Explain to him/her that once he/she is able to play nicely and not push or hurt the other children then he/she can go back to playing with his/her friends.
- **Review and Teach Alternatives** – After your child calms down you should review what just happened. Try to talk about and figure out why he/she got so upset and reacted how he/she did. In addition, be sure to discuss how the child could have handled the situation more appropriately and what some better choices would have been for him/her to engage in.
- **Stay Calm** – While dealing with aggressive behaviors, remember to stay calm. You can address the problem of concern using a calm, natural tone. You do not need to get worked up and scream or yell. By yelling, slamming doors, or hitting, you are setting a bad example for your child. Being able to keep your cool and show him/her how you can handle an upsetting situation appropriately will help him/her to learn from your example.
- **Physical Activities** – Children love to run and play. Many kids are very energetic, and if they cannot release this energy they can become very aggressive and hard to manage. By providing time for your child to engage in physical activity and exercise it can help him/her stay more regulated and under control.
- **Reward Appropriate Behavior** – Be sure that you are providing praise for when your child is playing appropriately and demonstrating good behaviors. You do not want to always be focusing on the negative behaviors but need to provide positive feedback for when the child is appropriately interacting with others and solving problems.
- **Seek Help** – If you are still struggling with reducing the aggressive behaviors your child displays, do not be scared to seek help. Sometimes consulting with a doctor, psychologist, or a [behavior analyst](#) is the extra support you need to help get a handle on your child's aggressive behaviors.