

## Aggressive Behavior

### What is it?

Behavior that hurts or could hurt someone or something is aggressive behavior. This means biting, kicking, hitting, pinching, slapping, grabbing, deliberately breaking things or throwing objects.

### Why do children act this way?

Most children have tried aggressive behavior at some time. It is a normal response to not getting what they want. However, hurting others or breaking things is not an acceptable way to get what your child wants.

Children imitate what they see. If they see violent, aggressive behavior (on television, among friends, in the home), they are more likely to act that way themselves. This is why spanking and slapping usually do not control aggressive behavior. If a lot of rough housing or aggressive play goes on in the home, children will tend to think that is the way everyone plays.

### Suggestions for dealing with aggressive behavior:

1. Make a rule.
  - "Hitting is not allowed" or "No pinching" or "You may not kick your sister."
2. Place your child in time-out if he breaks the rule (or use another type of discipline).
  - Time out should be in a consistent place each time it is used.
  - "I told you hitting is not allowed. Go to your room."
3. Discipline the same way each time the rule is broken.
4. Pay attention to why your child is aggressive. What makes him act this way? Did he just see someone fighting on television? Did he just see Mom spanking his brother? Did he just rough house with his uncle, but the uncle is ready to stop and he isn't? Did someone take away his toy?
5. Get him to talk about how he feels (I'm angry about...). Listen and try to understand.
6. Model good behavior in your home. Don't use violence or aggressive behavior yourself. That means no spanking, whipping, or beating. Find a different type of discipline to use. Get out of abusive relationships.

7. Suggest other ways for him to express and control his anger:
  - Talking.  
"I'm angry with you when you take my toy."
  - Walking away from the situation.
  - Getting help from a parent or teacher.
  - Counting to 10.
  - Physical activity: running around may help your child feel less angry.
  - "Squash it": time to stop, think and cool off.  
Instead of hitting, he slaps his fist with his open hand, looks the other person in the eye and says "squash it."
  - Punching a pillow or punching bag – never a person or animal.
8. Praise your child for friendly behavior. "I know you're angry, and I like the way you are still playing nice with your sister."
9. Don't punish when you're angry. Spanking, hitting, slapping, and yelling don't do any good in the long run and don't teach the child self-control.

**Call your child's health care provider if:**

- Your child's behavior seems dangerous.
- Your child is always angry.
- You are angry and losing your temper with your child.
- You are afraid you may hurt your child.
- You have other questions or concerns.