

Hitting and Aggressive Behavior

Definition

- Hitting is the most common type of aggressive behavior
- Others include slapping, pinching, scratching, poking, hair-pulling, biting, kicking, shoving, and knocking down
- Hurting other people (assault) is not acceptable in the adult world. It's not allowed on school grounds. It's also potentially harmful. We need to teach children not to behave this way.

Health Information

Causes

- Children experiment with aggressive behavior when they are angry. They do not like something another child did and they retaliate. Some want something another child has and see force as the easiest way to get it.
- Most children try aggressive behaviors because they see children or people on TV react this way. If children get what they want by hitting, this behavior becomes more frequent.
- Some children become very aggressive because they are spanked at home or witness domestic violence.

Prevention of Angry Outbursts

- Children younger than 3 or 4 years old often do not know how to express their feelings in words. They need help finding and using the words.
- You want your child to learn to talk about his anger in a calm but assertive way. Encourage your child to come to you when he is angry and talk about it until he feels better.
- Teach an older child to stop and count to 10 before doing anything about his anger.
- Try to teach your child to walk away from bad situations, especially provocative ones.
- Teaching your child how to control anger provides him with a valuable skill.

Care Advice

1. **Clarify the Rule: "No Hitting":**
 - Reason: "Hitting hurts. We do not hurt people."
 - For other aggressive behaviors, just change to that word.
2. **Interrupt Any Aggressive Behavior with a Sharp "No":**
 - When your child hurts someone, intervene now. Be sure to use an unfriendly voice and look your child straight in the eye.
 - Sometimes if he looks like he is going to hit someone, interrupt before he actually does it. Stop the behavior at the threatening or shoving stage. Do not wait until the victim is hurt or screaming.
 - There are some aggressive behaviors where punishment for intent may be needed. Close supervision of your child will be needed until you are sure hitting has become a low risk.
3. **Give a Time-Out When He Hurts Someone:**
 - Send him to a boring place or corner. Require one minute per year of age in time-out.
 - If time-out does not work, also take away a favorite toy or screen time for the rest of the day.
 - When a child is in time-out, don't be surprised if they pout, yell in their room, or pound on the door. As long as the behavior is not destructive, ignore it during time-out.

4. **Never Hit Your Child for Hitting Someone Else:**
 - Hitting your child teaches that it is fine to hit if you are bigger.
 - If your child tends to be aggressive, it's important to avoid any physical punishment for discipline.
 - Time-out or taking away privileges work even better to teach your child right from wrong.
5. **Help Your Child Verbalize His Feelings:**
 - If your child has trouble talking about his anger, put it into words for him: "I know that you feel angry."
 - It is unrealistic to expect your child not to feel anger.
 - You may need to make an understanding statement such as, "You wish you could punch your brother, but we cannot hurt other people."
6. **Teach Your Child Acceptable Ways to Get What He Wants:**
 - Tell your child that if he wants something, he should come to you and ask for help.
 - Teach your child to ask for what he wants rather than take it.
 - Teach him how to take turns. Teach him how to trade one of his toys to gain use of another child's toy.
7. **Give Special Attention to the Victim:**
 - When children start fighting, try to rescue the victim before he is hurt.
 - While the child who was aggressive is in time-out, pick up the child who has been attacked. Give him a hug and words of comfort. Your attention to the victim may prompt the aggressive child to think more about his behavior.
 - It always helps to give your child a hug when he is released from time-out.
8. **Praise Your Child for Friendly Behavior:**
 - Praise your child for kindness. Praise for playing with others in a friendly way, sharing things, and helping other children.
 - Some children like a system of receiving a treat or a star for each day they do not hurt anyone.

Call Your Doctor If

- Your child has injured another child
- Your child can't keep friends
- Your child has been sent home from school for aggressive behavior
- Your child seems very angry
- Aggressive behavior is very frequent
- Aggressive behavior is not improved after using this plan for 4 weeks
- You have other questions or concerns

Pediatric Care Advice

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