



## AAP News Parent Plus

INFORMATION FROM YOUR PEDIATRICIAN

### Strategies for handling an aggressive preschooler

If your preschooler lets out his frustration by biting, hitting or kicking, he may need more than a time-out.

You're at the playground when your 3-year-old pushes a playmate and steals his toy. What should you do?

Many parents don't know how to react when their young child behaves aggressively. Seth Scholer, M.D., M.P.H., FAAP, a member of the American Academy of Pediatrics' (AAP) Committee on Injury, Violence and Poison Prevention, has studied aggression in preschoolers. Using material from organizations including the AAP, the American Psychological Association and the National Association for the Education of Young Children, he developed a program to manage hurtful behavior in children ages 1 to 7 years.

Following are some strategies Dr. Scholer and other child behavior experts suggest for teaching your child how to respond to frustration in healthy and constructive ways.

- Set the rule. Make sure your child knows that hitting is not allowed.
- Redirect the behavior. Teach your child positive behaviors to replace hurtful ones. If your child hits, tell him, "That is not what we do with our hands." Then have him do something positive with his hands, like building with blocks. If he has kicked a playmate, have him kick a ball. This will teach your child that there are acceptable and unacceptable uses for his body parts.
- Promote empathy. If your child pushes her friend down, have her help the friend get back up. Remind her of a time when she was pushed and ask how it felt.
- Role-play. You can role-play situations with your child in which he is likely to become angry or frustrated. Sug-



gest ways he can respond appropriately, like asking for a turn or "using his words."

- Praise good behavior. For example, tell your child, "I like how you shared your crayons." This will help her learn what behavior is expected.
- Be a good model. If your child sees you yelling or slamming your fist when you are frustrated, he will learn that this is an acceptable way to respond to stress.

In addition, refrain from spanking or hitting your child; it does not teach her what she did wrong or what she could have done instead.

It's also important to teach your child how to respond if another youngster hurts him. He should look the other child in the eye and say, "That hurt. Please don't do that again."

Remember that all children and adults behave badly at times. Never tell your child that she is a "bad child," only that her actions were bad.

— Rose Pastore