

Toddlers and Aggression

You and your child are enjoying a play date when suddenly, your toddler grabs a toy from the other child. What do you do?

Aggression in toddlers is normal and more frequently driven by frustration and the impulse to get what they want, than by the intent to hurt someone. Toddlers tend to fight over possessions; they just know that they want something and they want it now!

Learning to control their emotions is a challenge at this stage. Tantrums are quite common and sometimes go with aggression. Toddlers can easily use aggression to gain attention. They do it spontaneously or imitate others and experiment with different behaviours. “No!” is a word toddlers love to use to assert their growing independence.

While physical aggression increases with age – generally peaking between the second and third birthdays – the good news is that somewhere around age three, the frequency of physical aggression should begin to decrease.

Comfort, Play & Teach: A Positive Approach to Parenting®

Invest in Kids created Comfort, Play & Teach: A Positive Approach to Parenting to help parents address challenging behaviours like aggression. Comfort, Play & Teach are three simple ideas. When put into action they can have a big effect on your child's development.



Comfort your child

Comfort is the first thing that children need from parents. When you comfort your child, she learns to feel secure, loved and valued.



Play with your child

Play is the “work of children,” and you are an essential “partner.” When you play with your child, he learns to explore and discover the world and his role in it.



Teach your child

Teach is what parents do to help their children learn. When you teach your child, she learns how to relate to others, solve problems and communicate



Comfort, Play & Teach Strategies for Toddlers

When emotions turn into aggressive behaviour, help your child learn how to channel those feelings into acceptable behaviour. Using Comfort, Play & Teach strategies to prevent or to respond to aggressive behaviour will help your toddler contain his emotions and get along with others.

Comfort

- **Respond to aggression with words of acceptance for what he is feeling, e.g., “I know you are angry.”** He needs to know someone understands him.
- **Talk about what might be making your child feel the way she is feeling, e.g., “I can see you are angry because I won’t let you eat that.** Let’s go over here and talk about it.” Your toddler needs to know you care about her feelings and that you will help her to cope with them.
- **The life of a toddler can be full of “no’s.”** Be sure to notice and reward his good behaviour.

Play

- **Provide opportunities for pretend play during which your child can experiment with and express different emotions.** Join in the play so you can act out different emotions and show your child ways to work out challenging ones, without becoming aggressive.
- **Have play dates with other children on a consistent basis and be present so you can help your child deal more positively with any frustrating experiences that might lead to aggressive behaviour.**

Teach

- **If your toddler hurts someone, get involved immediately.** Toddlers need your help to understand what is wrong and how to repair the harm. Stay calm and avoid overreacting as this can actually increase aggression in children who are using aggression to gain attention.
- **Look into your child’s eyes and speak calmly, but firmly.** You might say, “No hitting/pushing/biting people!” and point out, “Look. You hurt him and he’s crying.” Young children need to learn the consequences of their aggression.
- **As things calm down, give a short explanation of what went wrong,** acknowledging your toddler’s feelings, e.g., “I know you were mad, but what you did hurts. We don’t hurt people.”
- **Teach your child to say, “I’m sorry,”** and help your child learn how to patch things up.
- **Encourage your toddler to use words to describe his emotions** through activities such as pretend play or reading books together. Language offers children an alternative to expressing anger and frustration through aggression.
- **During daily routines and activities talk about your own emotions** or those that your toddler may be feeling and expressing.

Positive Parenting Strategies to Cope with Aggression

- It's not helpful to be harsh, but it is necessary to be firm. Your toddler's memory is under construction, and she will test to see if you are definitely consistent in many different settings.
- It's important to be a good example in handling your own anger and frustration. Brothers, sisters, and playmates will be imitated, too. Remember, set a positive tone for your toddler's behaviour through your own actions, those of your other children and by choosing friends for your toddler who will be good models to copy.
- Provide lots of reminders about what is and isn't acceptable behaviour. It can be frustrating having to tell your child something over and over again, but some children need to be told many times before they fully understand you.

What a child will be
depends on you and me™



www.investinkids.ca



CANADIAN COUNCIL ON LEARNING
CONSEIL CANADIEN SUR L'APPRENTISSAGE

For more information on *Comfort, Play & Teach: A Positive Approach to Parenting and your child's development* visit www.investinkids.ca

Invest in Kids is a national charitable organization. Invest in Kids is a registered trademark of Invest in Kids Foundation. All Rights Reserved. Comfort, Play & Teach is a registered trademark of Invest in Kids Foundation. All Rights Reserved. © 2007 Invest in Kids Foundation.