

TINY BITS (BETTER INFORMED TOGETHER) FOR FAMILIES WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

DAUPHIN COUNTY MH/A/DP
APRIL 2022 TINY BIT

Strategies for Managing Aggression in Young Children

During your child's early years, you will likely observe behaviors associated with aggression. While it is important to remember that this behavior is part of your child's development, you may question if the behaviors could lead to a larger problem down the road. Before the age of 2, children do not have hostile intent behind their actions. At around age 2 children begin to understand that when they are angry, they can respond with physical force. At the same time, children this age do not understand much about cause and effect. Children are not able to understand the consequences of their actions or how to properly regulate behavior toward others. While you may feel that your child understands consequences when they look ashamed following scolding, this is not the case. The child is not understanding that they hurt someone but rather that they earned your disapproval. While aggression can be alarming, it is not likely your 2-year-old will continue being aggressive as they age. With this in mind, there are steps that you can take to help manage aggression in young children. This will likely lead to better outcomes as your child gets older. In this month's Tiny BITS we discuss strategies for managing aggression in young children.

1. **Limits are part of loving**-Children who feel loved and cared for will be more likely to follow your guidance. Putting reasonable restrictions on your child's behavior is part of loving them.
2. **Figure out triggers**-Maybe it is being overtired, being rushed, or not getting something he wants. Ask yourself what might have happened to set him off. Understanding the triggers will likely help you better manage the behavior.
3. **Use what you know**-Make use of what you already know about your child's temperament, preferences, and sensitivities. If you know she is irritable in the first hour the day, it may not be the best time to have expectations. Utilizing routines or items that typically soothe your child, and then gradually introducing expectations is a good option.
4. **Be clear**-Tell your child what you want her to do or not do in a specific situation. Taking away a privilege from a 3-year-old who is hitting a sibling is unlikely to help her understand the behavior is wrong. Explaining that you do not like when she hits and that it hurts her brother is the most effective message.
5. **Be a coach**-Demonstrate how to handle a situation when there is a conflict. A 2-year-old can say "no" or "mine" to keep a toy rather than hitting or pushing another child who attempts to grab it.
6. **Use language**-If your child has language skills, help him explain why she is angry. If she is unable to say why, you can do it for her. "I guess you are mad because we cannot go to the park. I understand how you feel, but it is too late today."
7. **Be sure you are not sending mixed messages**-Children can be humorous; however, if you tell your child not to hit while laughing at his behavior, this will only lead to confusion. Even the tone of your voice is important for your child to get the message. It is the behavior, not the child.
8. **Be a role model**-Parents are the most important role models for their children. Some situations can be unavoidable, but if your child hears you screaming at someone every time you have conflict, they will likely pick up this behavior.
9. **Be patient**-Learning takes time. You will have ups and downs; however, it is important to remember to stay with the course.

