

# Dealing With Aggressive Behavior in Young Children: Care Instructions



## Overview

All children have times when they are angry and defiant. Many children begin to express these emotions during their second year. It is a normal part of a child's urge to take charge of their life. However, your child may act out in ways that puzzle or frighten you. It can be very painful to see your child bullying other children or becoming violent.

You can help your child learn to understand and manage angry feelings. Show your child the behavior you want to see. Set firm, clear limits around what behavior is okay. If you are consistent in your own behavior, it will help your child understand how to behave with other people. If you need help with your child's behavior, talk to your doctor or a counselor.

**Follow-up care is a key part of your child's treatment and safety.** Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if your child is having problems. It's also a good idea to know your child's test results and keep a list of the medicines your child takes.

## How can you care for your child at home?

- Teach your child ways to express anger that do not hurt others. Do not reward angry or violent behavior.
- Show your child how to use words to express feelings. Praise your child when they use words instead of fists.
- Engage your child in games and activities where playing well with others pays off. Children can learn a lot about "cause and effect" by rolling a ball back and forth with someone.
- Teach your child that sharing and give-and-take mean that both people win. For example, have one child divide a snack and have the other child pick first, or have one child suggest two games and have the other child choose first.
- Help your child learn that it is okay to be angry at times and that there are healthy ways to work through that anger.
- Be consistent with your limits, and make sure your child understands what the limits are. Just as important, follow through on what happens if your child exceeds limits.
- Try using a "time-out" to stop aggressive behavior. Time-out means that you remove your young child from a stressful situation for a short period of time. The rule of thumb is 1 minute for each year of age, with a maximum of 5 minutes. This gives your child time to calm down and think

about their actions.

- Time-out works if it happens right after the bad behavior. Do not wait until later in the day or week.
- Time-out works best when your child is old enough to understand. This usually begins around three years of age.
- When you put your child in time-out, do not do it in anger. Be calm and firm.
- Give your child a hug after the time-out is over.
- Talk to your doctor about parent education classes or helpful books about child behavior.
- Talk with other parents about the ways they cope with behavior issues.

## **When should you call for help?**

call anytime you think your child may need emergency care. For example, call if:

- You are so frustrated with your child that you are afraid you might cause them physical harm.

Contact your doctor if:

- You want tips on helping your child control their behavior.
- You would like to see a counselor.
- You would like your child to see a counselor.

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