

PARENTING NEWSLETTER

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UNDERSTANDING AGGRESSION IN YOUNG CHILDREN



Aggression is Often Communication

Young children experience emotions as intensely as adults—but they lack the vocabulary and emotional regulation skills to express them appropriately. Instead of saying, "I'm frustrated," "I want that toy," "I'm scared," they may communicate through behaviour. Behaviour is often a child's first language.



Dear Parents,

A recent incident reported in the media, where a toddler was repeatedly injured by another child while left unsupervised at a daycare, has understandably left many parents feeling anxious. While the incident underscores the importance of safe supervision, it also raises an important question:

Why do young children sometimes bite, hit, push or scratch other children?

Although such behaviours can be upsetting, they are often not signs of a "bad" or "aggressive" child. More often, they reflect a child who has not yet developed the emotional and language skills needed to express frustration, fear, excitement, or disappointment.

- Research also suggests that approximately 10–20% of preschool children may display frequent aggressive behaviours during early childhood. For most children, these behaviours naturally reduce as communication and emotional regulation improve with guidance and consistent adult support.
- Studies published in the journal *Child Development* show that children with strong emotional regulation skills demonstrate better friendships, fewer behavioural concerns, improved classroom adjustment and stronger academic outcomes later in school.



✓ DO

- ✓ Stay calm.
- ✓ Help your child understand what happened.
- ✓ Set clear and consistent limits.
- ✓ Encourage empathy by asking, "How do you think your friend felt?"
- ✓ Work together with teachers if aggressive behaviour is repeated.

✗ DON'T

- ✗ Label your child as "naughty" or "aggressive."
- ✗ Shame or humiliate them.
- ✗ Compare them with siblings or friends.
- ✗ Ignore repeated aggressive behaviour.



HOW PARENTS CAN HELP

- **Teach feelings before correcting behaviour**
Help children label emotions. Naming emotions reduces emotional intensity.
- **Model calm behaviour**
Children borrow emotional regulation from adults. A calm parent teaches more than an angry lecture.
- **Notice positive behaviour**
Children repeat behaviours that receive attention. Praise sharing, waiting, helping and gentle hands.
- **Read stories about emotions**
Books and pretend play help children understand feelings, empathy and problem-solving.

WHEN SHOULD PARENTS SEEK HELP?

Consider speaking with your child's teacher, school counsellor or a child psychologist if aggression:

- becomes frequent or intense
 - causes injury to others
 - continues beyond the preschool years
 - is accompanied by delays in speech, social interaction or emotional development.
- Early support helps children learn healthier ways to express themselves.

