

# iBlankie

*every parent's security blanket*



## **AGGRESSION AT HOME: A DETAILED PLAN**

*"It's a good day if I didn't hit or bite or kick someone."*

*~Ethan, age 4*

## INTRODUCTION

Children's aggressive behavior can be a frequent and upsetting occurrence in classrooms with young children. This 22-page article *Aggression at Home: A Detailed Plan* focuses on a plan for working with children's verbal and physical aggression and turning that aggression into socially-appropriate verbal expression.

This article offers...

- Anticipatory strategies and rehearsals for dealing with a child's angry feelings beforehand.
- Words and strategies to use in-the-moment.
- Alternatives to time-outs.

iBlankie also offers the 66-page expanded article [Anger Management for Children](#).

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# *GUIDELINES*

## *1. Wage peace.*

When working with physically aggressive young children, think of waging peace. It takes focus, dedication, time and effort to guide a child toward more mature, more socially appropriate behavior. Parents must modify their own behavior—and this can be very challenging—in order to modify a child’s behavior. Accomplish this by having a specific plan.

## *2. Have Three Big Rules*

Every home needs rules or guidelines, but too many rules can lead to problems. It is important to start with the most important rules and pick and choose our battles with young children. Here are the Three Big Rules:

### *RULE #1. EVERYBODY IS GENTLE WITH EVERYONE’S BODIES*

This is a positive way of saying: no kicking, biting, scratching, pinching, choking, hair-pulling, punching, arm-twisting, tripping, etc.

### *RULE #2. EVERYBODY IS GENTLE WITH EVERYONE’S FEELINGS*

This is a positive way of saying that we try not to hurt people’s feelings with statements such as: “You’re ugly,” “You can’t play,” “You can’t come to my birthday party,” “I hate you” or “You’re not my friend.”

### *RULE #3. EVERYBODY IS GENTLE WITH EVERYONE’S THINGS*

This is a positive way of saying that everybody should respect other people’s creations, by not ripping up their painting or knocking down their block castle, and that everyone should respect other people’s possessions, by not grabbing their fire engine or breaking their toy airplane.

The first two rules are of primary importance because they address rules for social relationships; the third rule, regarding things, is of less importance for a young child to learn at an early age.

These rules can be posted pictorially for your home. For Rule #1, you can have the number 1 followed by a photo or magazine picture of two children hugging or holding hands, that is, being gentle with bodies. For Rule #2, you can have the number 2 with a picture of two children talking together in a friendly way. For Rule #3, you can have 3 with a picture of two children playing together cooperatively.

### *3. The Parent's Goal is: Turn Aggression into Appropriate Verbal Expression*

One-year-olds bite, hit and kick. Two-year-olds bite, hit and kick. Less often, three-year-olds bite, hit and kick. Four-year-olds who bite, hit and kick are starting to push the envelope.

A child explores their world through their senses, initially through their mouths and through their hands. This oral and tactile means of learning comes naturally to young children and is often a child's first mode of communication in high-adrenaline moments. One of the most challenging issues in working with a young child is to help them control their impulses, be they oral or tactile.

Helping a child put their physical expressions of anger and frustration into verbal expression is a huge undertaking requiring a major developmental step. This requires a specific plan that focuses on changing specific behaviors.

### *4. The Child's Goal is: "Use Your Words."*

The ultimate goal for a child is to express their angry feelings in socially-appropriate words, turning physical aggression into verbal expression. It is important to provide a child with the words for their feelings.

In helping a child learn to put their angry feelings into words, it is also important to encourage their putting any feelings into words. A child's behavior is shaped in every interaction; recognizing a child's positive behavior and acknowledging this is extremely important in guiding and shaping a child's behavior. This requires that a teacher become additionally conscious in focusing on the goal of putting feelings into words, even when not handling aggression. Adults change children's behavior when they change their own behavior. You cannot underestimate the power of shaping a child's behavior with positive attention-getting. So much change can occur by verbally encouraging words, words, words in many, many situations and exchanges.

If a child is to begin using angry words instead of hurtful angry fists or kicks, then it becomes necessary to focus on words, words, words in an intense way. Once again, this is waging peace, a serious campaign to channel a child's angry feelings into angry words. Many times per hour, in situations independent of angry conflicts, it is important to reinforce a child's use of words.

- "Josie, I really like your words. When you use words to tell me what you want, it makes it so easy to help you."*
- "Great words that you are using with your friend, Alicia."*
- "Your words are wonderful, Jennifer."*
- "Raphael, I hear your words. Good words."*

- ☑ *"Great control. Using your words isn't easy when you're frustrated, but, Jason, you did it!"*
- ☑ *"Pippa, the way you are asking to share the doll with your words is wonderful. Your words make it so easy to understand what you want."*
- ☑ *"I like your words."*
- ☑ *"Mouths are for chewing, Gabriella. I like the way you are using your mouth to chew your snack."* (When working with biting.)
- ☑ *"I like your smile, Dane. Mouths are for smiling."* (When working with biting.)

## *5. Notice Details*

The really helpful information is in the small details: what occurred, what precipitated it, who was involved, what was the time of day? Was your child hungry or thirsty or tired? What was happening? Was a sibling involved who was demanding attention? Where were you? This information will help with many issues, including: is this negative attention-getting? Is there a pattern here that would be helpful to head off difficult conflicts in the future?

## *6. Identify Possible Triggers*

Try to identify possible triggers. This allows you to anticipate a situation or restructure a situation so that the triggers will not be present. It is important to explore possible biological, physical or nutritional triggers that may be contributing to a child's aggressive behavior. Some subtle triggers include:

### *ALLERGIES*

Some children have a low tolerance for frustration and are quick to anger as a result of their allergies, possibly allergies that are undetected. When a child is confronted with an allergen, be it environmental, food or chemical, their immune system spends valuable resources dealing with that allergen and a child has fewer resources to bring to a challenging situation. Those children often have less impulse control and less verbal ability. Angry feelings and angry or aggressive behaviors are sometimes linked with allergies.

Consult a pediatric allergist to focus on the possibilities of food, environmental or chemical allergies. Also be aware that it is possible for a child to have negative results in testing for a specific food allergy, but still have a sensitivity to that food, which affects the child behaviorally.

When I was a classroom teacher, it became empirical to me that in a typical classroom of 15 children, about three children had behaviors that were affected by allergies. Some of the effects were attentional issues or lack of energy, but some of the effects were angry or

aggressive confrontations with children and adults. I have seen aggressive children who go gluten-free or dairy-free become much calmer and controlled within several days of dietary changes.

A good resource book to help in pinpointing possible allergies is *Is this Your Child?: Discovering and Treating Unrecognized Allergies in Children and Adults* by Doris Rapp; this book is available in many libraries in their Resource Section. Dr. Rapp describes how to be a child's food detective by trying an elimination diet concerning the most common food allergies: eggs, wheat, soy, fish, dairy, and nuts.

### *MEDICATION*

It is empirical that medications can have a strong effect on a child's resources, lessening their self-control and contributing to meltdowns or temper tantrums. An antibiotic that a child has tolerated well previously can suddenly affect a child in terms of their behavior. Even over-the-counter medications can affect a child's impulse control and mood.

### *NUTRITION*

Food affects behavior, especially for young children who are working on impulse control as a developmental issue. It can be very helpful to consult a nutritionist who can recommend eliminations and supplements that can greatly affect a child's behavior.

### *FAMILY STRESS*

Family stress can often be absorbed and acted out by a young child as anger or aggression. Additional questions: Does the child get enough sleep? Is the morning transition from home to school stressful?

### *DELAYED SPEECH*

If a child has experienced delayed speech, this issue can sometimes contribute to a lower tolerance for frustration and can lead to anger management issues for a child, even years later. If this is the case, parents may need to consult an early childhood specialist.

## *7. Know Where the Child is on The Six Levels of Angry Expression*

There is a hierarchy of how children express their angry feelings, starting with physical expressions and progressing toward the more socially-appropriate, more developmentally mature verbal expressions. Each level indicates more maturity and even the smallest steps in a child's progress needs to be noticed and acknowledged. Often a young child is expected to transition from hitting to using words. This is unrealistic since impulse control and mastering angry feelings take time, often many months for a young child, and it is important to recognize the interim progress until a child uses words exclusively.

The biggest developmental leap in working with angry feelings is when a child moves from physical expression to non-physical expression of angry feelings. This is HUGE progress and may take a good deal of time to solidify for a young child. Once a child makes a leap to verbal expression, you can slowly refine the appropriateness of the verbal expression.

### *SIX LEVELS OF ANGRY EXPRESSION*

Physical Expression		
Level 1	Aggression Upon a Person	Biting, hitting, kicking, pinching
Level 2	Aggression on an Object	Ripping a painting, breaking a toy
Level 3	No physical contact	Tantrum, crying, pointing finger as a gun
Oral Expression		
Level 4	Non-verbal	Spitting, shrieking, growling
Level 5	Verbal, inappropriate	Cursing, screaming words
Level 6	Verbal, appropriate	Expressing anger in acceptable words and tone

**Note:** iBlankie's 66-page ebook [Anger Management for Children](#) has a detailed discussion.

It is very important to recognize that a child may need to experience each level and that moving to a more mature level is progress, not perfection, but definite progress. If a child has been hitting and then the child begins screaming instead of hitting, it is important to recognize and speak to that progress. If you tell a child not to scream, then you cut off that more mature outlet and often a child will revert back to the lower level, hitting.

Jackson was a young three and sometimes hit at his daycare. His teachers worked hard by encouraging his words. One day Jackson got angry at a teacher and said, *"I hate you!"* The teacher said, *"Don't say that to me!"* Jackson then began kicking her. Later the teacher realized that the angry screaming was actually progress on Jackson's part since Jackson was putting his angry feelings into words.

The words were not the words she wanted to hear, but the words were a major developmental leap from hitting. The next time Jackson said, *"I hate you!"* The teacher responded, *"You sound angry. I like the way you put your feelings into words. Great control, Jackson."* Jackson continued to scream, but he did not revert to hitting. Jackson had made



progress toward putting his angry feelings into words. At a later, cooler moment, the teacher rehearsed more appropriate words for Jackson to use when he was angry.

Start at the appropriate level. It is important to start where a child is now. If a child is biting or hitting, then moving to the next step by not being physical with a person, even if it involves smashing someone's playdough snake, is progress because the child showed control in not hurting someone's body. If a child has been breaking toys when angry, then a child's shrieking when angry is progress, as it is progression from a physical expression of anger to an oral expression of anger. If a child has been kicking when angry and then starts crying when angry, that shows a tremendous amount of control; crying is a physical, but harmless, means of releasing angry feelings. It is important that a child's angry expressions be viewed within the above hierarchy of angry expressions so that progress can be recognized and encouraged.

### *8. Expect Progress, not Perfection*

Measure progress in terms of changes in frequency, intensity, and duration. Is the behavior happening less often? Is the behavior less intense? Are the episodes shorter? Remember that transgressions are opportunities for learning and growth. Rehearse appropriate behavior after a cooling off period. Bring compassion to the situation. Remember that "Young children do not always understand and remember the rules." (quote from NAEYC brochure #516 available at [www.naeyc.org](http://www.naeyc.org)).

Have age-appropriate expectations. Given real life, it is common for there to be two steps forward, one step back, two steps forward, one step back in terms of the challenging task of channeling physical aggression into verbal expression.

### *9. Provide More 1-on-1 Time*

Every child needs time and attention from their parents. And, to a young child, negative attention-getting satisfies that need more than no attention at all. When a child acts out aggressively, there is often the question as to whether this is negative attention-getting.

Providing plenty of 1-on-1 time with your child, even in 15-30 minute segments, can ensure that your child's aggression is not linked to negative attention-getting. 1-on-1 time with your child where you are totally focused on your child is a VERY POWERFUL strategy in changing your child's behavior toward a more positive direction. 1-on-1 time with your child several times a week may change your child's behavior in as few as two or three weeks.

## *STRATEGIES*

### *10. Use Encouragement!*

Provide encouragement every 5 minutes! Catch the child being good. Every 5 minutes again and again. When we change our behavior and respond in positive moments, powerful changes occur. This isn't easy, but it is necessary! Focus on one behavior and one positive phrase and use that phrase OFTEN!

- "Gentle hands. Good gentle hands."* (For physical aggression.)
- "I like your gentle words."* (For verbal aggression.)
- "I like how you are using your mouth for talking/drinking/smiling, etc."* (For biting.)

### *11. Keep your Child's Mouth or Hands or Feet Busy*

If your child tends to bite, keep their mouth busy, either with a pacifier attached to their shirt with an elastic band or with a bagel or with a gel gum soother or, at an appropriate age, chewing gum. If a child tends to bite, they may be seeking deep oral pressure and may need to eat crunchy foods to satisfy some oral cravings; if this seems to be the case, the child should be evaluated by an occupational therapist recommended by your pediatrician.

If your child tends to hit, keep their hands busy. Have playdough to push and pound or encourage them to carry a soft object. Keep them building with LEGOS and painting and crafting and throwing a ball.

If your child tends to kick, have them remove their shoes. A child won't kick if it hurts them as much as it hurts the other person.

### *12. Play The Slow-Medium-Fast Game for Self-Control*

At the cornerstone of all the desired behavior changes in a child is self-control. Children learn best through play. Use the Slow-Medium-Fast Game to encourage a child to practice self-control.

The Slow-Medium-Fast Game has two parts: (1) the activity itself and (2) verbal positive reinforcement for a child's self-control. The S-M-F Game consists of encouraging a child to perform many activities at different speeds or different levels. The second part of the game is your comment on the self-control used by a child. Interweave this game throughout the day into your normal activities and schedule, especially when there is physical activity or singing. Transition times are also a good time to play the Slow-Medium-Fast Game.

- ☑ *"Let's clean up superfast, like a whirlwind... Now let's clean up slow... Now let's stop...Now let's clean up at regular speed. Great control!"*
- ☑ *"Let's sing a whisper version of this song... Now, can you sing in a medium voice? Can you shout that song? Can you stop singing now? Great voice control. You are so good at controlling your singing."*
- ☑ *"Can you ride your bike slowly, Jeremiah? Good slow riding. Can you ride your bike at medium speed? Good speed control. Can you now ride your bike as fast as a cheetah can run? Can you now stop suddenly? You really controlled the speed of your bike. Great listening and great control. You are really gearing your bike up and down."*

### ***13. Do 30-Second Rehearsals Every Hour***

Partner with a child in practicing putting angry feelings into words. Rehearsals in childcare settings can include several classroom children at the same time so that it becomes a group rehearsal.

So often we tell children what not to do, but we do not tell them what to do. Rehearsals solidify a child's new behavioral responses and provide alternative neurological pathways and behaviors when a similar conflict situation arises. Rehearsals should occur in cool moments separate from conflict situations. A rehearsal is a 30-second (yes, 30 seconds!) practice session in which you and a child role play and practice a specific socially appropriate outlet for anger.

Suppose you want a child to say "No!" rather than hit when angry (or a child can choose an alternative phrase such as "I'm mad!") During a rehearsal you can say, *"I'm concerned about what happens when you get angry. Let's practice saying 'No!' when I take this toy away from you....Let's hear a loud 'No!' That's great...a little louder 'No!' Terrific...that's a great way to let someone know what you want....what a great 'No!' I like the way you are putting your feelings into words."*

Practicing in this manner several times each day, over an extended period of time, helps to establish a new way for a child to express anger and frustration.

A younger or less verbal child may need to rehearse nonverbal outlets for angry feelings. During this rehearsal, a child might practice stomping like an angry dinosaur or curling up like an angry hedgehog as in the book *When Emily Woke Up Angry* by Riana Duncan, or stirring up a bowl of *Mean Soup* as in the book by Betsy Everitt.

## *14. Exercise*

Exercise is an amazing stress-reliever for everyone and can help calm your child. Encourage your child to run, play ball, bike, climb, slide, bounce, hop, skip, and jump at every opportunity. Outside play in fresh air and in parks is particularly cathartic and healing, especially for physically active children. Exercise is a MUST in every young child's day.

## *15. Use Encouragers in Moderation*

For some children stickers are effective encouragers. It is important that, if stickers are used, the encourager-behavior connection is clearly defined. It is also important that a child's process as well as a child's behavior be rewarded, so that a child's attempts to change their behavior are recognized. A child could receive a sticker for trying to be gentle with their hands for 10 minutes and then another sticker for actually being gentle with their hands for 10 minutes. This should be stated clearly to a child beforehand. All encouragers should be used for specific behaviors and for short intervals of five or ten minutes. All encouragers should be used in moderation.

## *16. Books Help*

Books can be helpful in working with young children concerning their angry feelings. Be careful to choose books where the resolution of the angry feelings is positive. Some suggestions are listed.

### *YOUNGER CHILDREN*

- Blumenthal, Deborah, The Chocolate-Covered-Cookie Tantrum.
- Cain, Barbara S., Double-Dip Feelings, Stories to Help Children Understand Emotions.
- Duncan, Riana, When Emily Woke Up Angry.
- Everitt, Betsy, Mean Soup. \*
- Mitchell, Edna Preston, The Temper Tantrum Book.\*\*
- Simon, Norma, I Was So Mad!
- Steig, William, Spinky Sulks.

## OLDER CHILDREN

- Blume, Judy, *The Pain and the Great One*. Deals with sibling competition
- Conlin, Susan & Susan LeVine Friedman, *All My Feelings at Preschool: Nathan's Day*.
- Conlin, Susan and Susan LeVine Friedman, *All My Feelings At Home: Ellie's Day*.
- Crary, Elizabeth, *Dealing with Feelings: I'm Mad; Dealing with Feelings: I'm Frustrated*.
- Viorst, Judith, *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day*.
- Wilhelm, Hans, *Let's Be Friends Again*.
- Zolotow, Charlotte, *The Hating Book*.

\**Mean Soup* is particularly helpful for very young children, as Horace expresses lots of angry feelings nonverbally and with control. Children may find it helpful and fun to act out Horace's actions as you read.

\*\**The Temper Tantrum Book* is excellent. So few books depict temper tantrums. After reading this book, you might want to staple some blank pages into a book and start a child's temper tantrum book: "*Terran's Temper Tantrum Book*". The child can dictate to you what makes them angry or frustrated and can draw or put stickers on the opposite page. This temper tantrum book can then be used in angry situations: "Terran, is it time to add a page to your *Temper Tantrum Book*?"

### 17. Use Feeling Notes

Feeling notes can be extremely powerful in helping a child work through anger. Feeling notes are similar to adult journaling. It is helpful to write feeling notes in-the-moment of an angry conflict, but writing that note will be easier if you and the child have had some practice writing notes beforehand in cooler moments.

If child is disappointed because they didn't get to see their grandmother as they expected. You can talk about their feelings and suggest that they dictate a note to their grandmother.

Dear Nana,

I wanted to see you now. I am disappointed, very, very disappointed. (Aside: "*How many times should we use 'very'—one or two?*"). I wanted to play with you for \_\_\_\_ minutes. (Aside: "*How many minutes?*") I miss you so, so, so much. (Aside: "*How many 'so-s' should I use?*") I am feeling same/better/worse now. (Ask in an aside which it is.)

Love, (Aside: "*How should we sign it?*")

Often the first feeling note or two can be the most challenging to write. After feeling notes become a part of a child's and a class's repertoire, these notes can be very helpful in the heat of some angry confrontations.

### *18. Use the A-B-C-C Model for In-the-Moment Aggression*

**Note:** The iBlankie 66-page article [Anger Management for Children](#) contains a detailed discussion of the A-B-C-C Model with many examples.

A=Acknowledge and Accept Angry Feelings

B=Behavior—Set Limits or Offer Encouragement

C=Channel Anger into Appropriate Outlets: Notes, Imagination, Choices, Exercise

C=Consequences: Relevant, Brief, Immediate

Given real life, it is common for there to be two steps forward, one step back, two steps forward, one step back, two steps forward in terms of the challenging task of channeling physical aggression into verbal expression.

## *A-B-C-C ANGER MODEL*

Guideline	Concept	Words/Action
A=Acknowledge Anger	Feelings first	"I see you are mad, frustrated"
B=Behavior – Set Limits	No physical expression	"People are not for kicking"
C=Channel Anger into Outlets	work/play anger through one of the following	
	Notes: Feelings into words	Feeling notes
	Imagination: Feelings into play	"Do you want to stomp like a T-Rex?"
	Choices: empowerment	"Do you want to ___ or ___?"
	Exercise: feelings out of body	"Do you want to do an angry dance?"
C=Consequences	Learning, not punishment	
	Relevant: repair what broke	"Let's talk or rebuild ___?"
	Brief: child's time concept	"Let's do this and move on."
	Immediate: child's cause and effect	"Let's do this now or within 5 minutes."

I suggest that you mentally rehearse this A-B-C-C Anger Model several times a day in cool moments by yourself so that it becomes part of your repertoire to use in conflict situations. The good news in all of this is: if you feel that you did not use this model perfectly the first time, the odds are, when being with young children, you will have another opportunity to try this model again within a short time!

### *A=Acknowledge and Accept Angry Feelings*

Focus on the words angry, frustrated and disappointed. By verbalizing these feelings, you are modeling putting feelings into words. Always try to do feelings first before you set a limit. Once a child feels heard and understood, it is often easier for them to move from their angry stance and to calm somewhat. Accepting the feelings is NOT accepting the behavior.

Since the ultimate goal is a child's putting their angry feelings into words, this acknowledgement of feelings should also include positive encouragement for a child's words if they used words.

- "You seem angry, Faith. I can understand that you want my attention when I am looking at Jacob's painting."*
- "Of course that makes you mad when Rashid takes your fire truck. I might be very, very angry, too, Hector, if that happened to me."*

### *B=Behavior—Set Limits, if Necessary*

Behavioral limits may need to be set. Or, if a child's behavior has not needed limits, encouragement can be offered for a child's good impulse control. It is important to set clear, firm behavioral limits.

It is important that you realize where a child has been on the [six levels of angry expression](#) and where on this hierarchy their current angry behavior resides. Is a child's angry behavior, though not totally appropriate, exhibiting progress? Once again, think progress, not perfection.

- "Great control, Amanda, in being gentle with Amy's body when you were angry."*
- "Aleisha, friends are not for hitting, friends are for hugging. We need to talk about what to do with your angry feelings."*
- "Robert worked hard on that castle, Joe. We need to talk about your frustrated feelings and then figure out which blocks you will use to help rebuild the castle."*

### *C=Channel Anger into N-I-C-E Outlets (Notes, Imagination, Choices, Exercise)*

A child may become angry and have a hard time letting go of their angry feelings, so that even discussing consequences or attempting rehearsals may not be productive until these angry feelings are released. If you have found a technique that helps a specific child release their angry feelings, go with that proven technique.

An easy memory key for recalling some socially-appropriate outlets for angry feelings is N-I-C-E: Notes-Imagination-Choices-Exercise.

- NOTES: Write a Feeling Note with a child.
- IMAGINATION: Use your imagination to find a cathartic outlet for a child. The phrase "I wonder..." can be a productive way to engage a child's imagination.

*"I hear that you are sad that your friend won't play with you. Tristan, it is great that you put your sad feelings into words. I wonder if you want to paint a sad picture."*



*"Tara, you seem mad that you can't have that doll now. Sometimes it is too hard to wait to share. Great words. I wonder if we should add another page to Tara's Temper Tantrum Book. I could write and you could draw a picture."*

*"You are mad at your friend Kyle. I see your angry face. Great control with your body, Atticus—you are being so gentle with my body and with Kyle's body. I am wondering how an angry T-Rex might stomp and growl?"*

- CHOICES: Sometimes giving a child choices may help them with their anger and help them feel more in control.

*"I know that you are angry that you can't go out on the playground because it's raining. Teachers are not for hitting. Teachers are for hugging. We need to find something else to do with your angry feelings. Sophie, you choose to write a feeling note to mom or to do an angry dance."*

*"You are still mad that you had to stop playing and clean up. I can understand that. Great control with using gentle hands with me. I see your angry pout. Do you want a few minutes to yourself to work this out or should we talk now? Where should we talk?"*

- EXERCISE: A child's moving their body can help release some of the angry feelings.

*"You are still sooo angry that Mom is away on a business trip. Carla, it's great that you used your words and told me how you feel. You still seem angry. Do you want to paint an angry picture?"*

*"Jose, You are angry at Jarrod for not wanting to sit next to you at snack time. It seems that you got your feelings hurt. We talked to Jarrod and you still seem hurt and angry. Do you want to stay here at snack or do you want to take a break and go outside and run around that big tree 20 times?"*

### *C=Consequences: Relevant, Brief, Immediate*

Consequences for any given situation with a young child should be relevant, brief, and immediate. Research has shown that children respond more to encouragement and positive reinforcement than to punishment and deprivation. It is important to approach all situations with a child, especially hot moments with a child, as opportunities for growing and learning. What is to be learned in this situation? How can we make this situation right? If someone's body or feelings have been hurt, how can we help them heal?

It is important to remember: "Young children do not always understand and remember the rules." And we adults don't always understand and remember that young children do not always understand and remember the rules. Growing up is hard. Helping a child grow up is hard, too.

- ☑ RELEVANT: Consequences should be relevant to the mistaken choice in behavior. If a child's anger was not expressed in a socially appropriate manner, then any harm that a child caused, be it physical or emotional or social, needs to be repaired.

One important goal in conflict resolution is about communication, not simply the resolution of a specific problem. Ensure that each person had an opportunity to speak and that each person had an opportunity to be heard. Each person needs a voice.

- ☑ BRIEF: Consequences should be brief so that they are congruent with a child's concept of time and allowing for a child's limited memory capacity.
- ☑ IMMEDIATE: Consequences should be immediate since young children have limited understanding of cause and effect.

### *A-B-C-C Examples*

- ☑ SITUATION #1: CHILD HITTING A SIBLING

RESPONSE: First tend to the child that has been hit. *"Are you okay? You had your body hit."* By tending to the presumed victim first, the possibility of a child being the physical aggressor as a means of seeking negative attention is diminished. Then turn your attention to the child who hit.

*"You seem very angry. Hitting hurts people. Your hands are for gentle touches. Use gentle hands. Let's see if your friend needs a cold washcloth or a band-aid. Then let's talk with your friend about your angry feelings."*

- ☑ SITUATION #2: CHILD IS HITTING YOU

RESPONSE: *"You seem very, very, very angry with me." You very gently hold Daniel's hands so that you cannot be hurt. "I can't let you hurt me. Parents are for hugging, not for hitting. You need to put your angry feelings into words. You could say, 'I'm angry.'" You can then provide outlets if a child is still angry.*

NOTE: *"Should we write a note to grandma and tell her how upset you are about having to stop playing and clean up?"*

IMAGINATION: *"I wonder...what would Batman do if he were really angry?"* or

CHOICES: *"Should we get some playdough and a hammer and take a minute to do some angry playdough pounding or do you want to add a page to your [The Temper Tantrum Book?](#)"*

EXERCISE: *"Do you want to do some angry running around the climber on the playground? I wonder if you can run around it 10 times or 25 times without stopping. Here's your coat."*

SITUATION #3: CHILD DESTROYING A SIBLING'S CREATION

For a younger child: *"You seem angry. Your brother's castle is not for knocking over. Use your words, say 'I'm mad!' Now let's help your friend rebuild his castle."*

For an older child: *"You seem angry, but your brother's castle shouldn't be destroyed. Use your words. 'I am angry at Elijah for not letting me play with the blocks.' Do you need to take a short break for a while or should we see which block should go at the bottom to start rebuilding the castle? We can talk with Elijah about your feelings as we build."*

SITUATION #4 : YOUR CHILD IS THREATENING ANOTHER WITH A FIST

RESPONSE: *"You are so, so angry, Sasha. Great control. You have raised your fist but you are being gentle with Jennifer's body. Great control. Use your words. Can you say, 'I'm angry!'"?*

SITUATION #5: YOUR CHILD IS JUMPING AND SCREAMING

RESPONSE: *"You seem very, very, very frustrated that you can't go out on the playground now. I really like how you used your control to be gentle with my body. Can you use your words? Can you say 'I'm MAD!'"? Your soft words are easier to hear and I know that you want me to listen.....You can help clean-up or you can help set the table for snack. Those are your choices."*

SITUATION #6: YOUR CHILD IS CALLING YOU "POOPHEAD!"

RESPONSE: *"I hear you screaming 'Poophead.' You seem very angry. That was great control—you were gentle with my body. Let's try saying, 'I'M MAD!' Let's talk about how you are feeling."*

## ***19. NO Time-Outs!***

For some reason, time-outs were the discipline flavor of the 1990s and that flavor still lingers on, but with a bad aftertaste. Time-outs are easy to administer, especially in a group situation, and take no thought on an adult's part, but, unfortunately, time-outs provide little learning for a child.

Parents often tell me that they use time-outs again and again. My response is: "Then time-outs don't seem to be working."

There are several serious concerns and issues with time-outs:

## *CAN A CHILD LEARN SOCIAL SKILLS IN ISOLATION?*

If you are trying to teach your child social skills, how can your child learn social skills in isolation? If conflict situations are viewed as opportunities for growth and learning, what is being accomplished during a time-out? Two things that are often learned by children who are timed-out: (1) be sneakier in your misdeeds and (2) be angry at the adult who put you in the time-out—the time-out is their fault, not yours.

When a child leaves the time-out chair and a similar conflict situation arises, that child has no additional skills to use in that situation. There has often been no talk or rehearsal to enlarge a child's behavioral repertoire for the next time they feel angry or upset.

## *WHO NEEDS THE TIME-OUT: YOU OR THE CHILD?*

Let's be honest here—often when children are timed-out, it is the adult that needs the time-out! Sometimes the adult needs space and time to cool down, not the child!

Some people say that they use time-outs effectively with young children. Some people use time-outs as a cooling off period. I think that this can be a valid approach if two guidelines are followed:

- A child is given a choice of where they want to be and for how long. "Do you want to take a cool down in the housekeeping corner or in the block corner? Should I check on you in two minutes or five minutes?"
- The cooling-off period is Step One of a longer process of working with a child's angry feelings. Taking some time and space apart may help a child come back together and talk about the situation, re-strategize for next time, and set up some models for further rehearsals over the next several days. This cooling off period should be step one in the process of working through this angry situation.

## *FAQ*

### **Q. What is developmentally-appropriate in terms of aggression in a young child?**

Young children bite, kick, hit, scratch, pull hair, choke, and pinch. By the time a child is four or four-and-a-half, then the majority of physically aggressive angry behavior should usually be under control. Certainly occasional slips occur, but if a child is very aggressive at age four or more, then professional help for that child needs to be considered.

I often receive calls from parents who are concerned that their two-year-old is about to be expelled from daycare because they are biting. When this occurs, the two-year-old should not be expelled for acting like a two-year-old; there needs to be a plan as suggested above

to work with that behavior. The behavior will not change immediately, but there can be significant changes in a two-year-olds behavior with a specific plan in place.

**Q.What are realistic expectations in working with a young child's aggression. How can I measure progress?**

It takes time for a child to change and use more impulse control. The developmental milestone of moving from the physical aggression of angry feelings to the verbal expression of angry feelings is perhaps the most challenging of behaviors for a young child. It is important to realize that when working with a young child concerning aggression that you are planting the seeds; you may not see immediate results.

In order to measure progress, it is important to notice changes in the frequency (how often the behavior occurs), the duration (how long an episode lasts), and the intensity of a child's behaviors.

**Q. My child keeps saying that she hates me and that I am stupid. It makes me so angry! What should I do?**

First use the [A-B-C-C Model](#) of addressing the situation. Be sure to re-frame the hatred and accusations of stupidity as anger, which is true.

*"I can hear that you are angry at me. I really like your words. Good control. I am wondering what I did or didn't do to make you angry. Let's talk."*

From your description, your daughter sounds at least 3-1/2, so you can sit down with her in a cooler moment and have a brief discussion.

*"I know that you when you are angry you really want me to hear you. When you use the words 'hate' and 'stupid' I have a hard time listening. What words could you use that make it easier for me to listen?"* Then you can be partnered with your daughter in coming up with a phrase such as *"I'm MAD!"* or *"I'm frustrated!"* and you can rehearse this with her several times a day, 30 seconds a rehearsal.

It might also be helpful to consider that your daughter may be hurt or disappointed and that she is manifesting these other feelings as anger.

In terms of why your daughter may be addressing her angry feelings at you, please see the answer to the next FAQ.

In terms of dealing with your own anger, you might want to look at the iBlankie article [Anger in Parents](#).

**Q. My son hits and kicks me, his mom, but never hurts anyone else. Why is he picking on me? What should I do?**

First of all, children often act most aggressively toward the person that they feel safest with—they know that you are there for them and that you won't leave. Also, you may be the

person that your child is around the most—you are in the line of fire and catch most of the heat coming from your child.

Be sure that you are spending enough one-on-one time with your child. Increasing your one-on-one time with your child to two to three times a week can improve your child's behavior in just a few short weeks.

Use the [A-B-C-C Model](#) for addressing your child's anger in-the-moment. Also try the other strategies concerning your son's feelings and behavior. It's not easy, but with some work you can help your son learn to control his anger and to put his angry feelings into words.

It is important to have age-appropriate expectations for your child. The younger your child, the less impulse control and fewer verbal skills; the older your child, the more quickly their behavior can be shaped.

Being a partner with your child in helping them with their angry feelings and angry behavior provides a foundation for partnering with your child throughout your relationship.

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