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every parent's security blanket



**ANGER MANAGEMENT
FOR CHILDREN
PART 2: ANGER IN THE MOMENT**

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INTRODUCTION

Children's angry feelings, children's angry words, and children's angry actions can be a frequent and upsetting occurrence in families with young children and in classrooms caring for young children. *Anger Management for Children* explores how parents, teachers, and early childhood professionals can help children deal with their angry feelings. This is Part 2 of a [two-part 66 page article](#).

Part 2 focuses on words and strategies to use in-the-moment when your child is angry. Techniques are explained to channel your child's angry feelings into appropriate verbal expressions and physical outlets. Alternatives to time-outs and spanking are discussed. A detailed 21-step plan for working with children's physical aggression at home and in the classroom is also outlined. An agenda for a parent-childcare staff meeting for dealing with physical aggression is presented.

[Part 1](#) deals with an anger overview and anticipatory strategies.

PART 1 REVIEW: YOUR CHILD'S ANGRY FEELINGS & ANGRY BEHAVIOR

Part 1 of this article, [Your Child's Angry Feelings And Angry Behavior](#), provides invaluable background for Part 2, *Anger In-The-Moment*. Here is a short review of goals and guidelines from Part 1.

- Overview: Anger occurs within a context. It is important to identify the causes or triggers for the angry situations. Triggers may include allergies, medication, stress, delayed development, and sensory issues.
- Overview: It is important that you examine your own history and feelings about anger in working with your child's anger. Explore your family of origin's attitude about angry feelings as well as your own current attitudes about anger.
- Overview: Communication with your child needs to be within their age-appropriate sensory sphere.
- Child's Goal: Your child puts their angry feelings into words.
- Your Goal: You are emotionally partnered with your child around their angry feelings. You help your child verbalize their anger, frustration, and disappointment.

- ☑ Your Goal: You are partnered with your child in guiding their angry behavior. The ultimate goal is to have your child put their angry feelings into words. For a child who is being physical, the goal is for the physical aggression to be changed to verbal expression. Your role is to set clear, firm limits around angry behavior, limits which will eventually be internalized by your child and help them with their impulse control issues.
- ☑ Guideline: You distinguish between angry feelings and angry behavior. You acknowledge and accept your child's angry feelings, while setting limits on their physical aggression or inappropriate angry behavior
- ☑ Guideline: There are Six Levels of Angry Expression. Knowing where your child's behavior is on this hierarchy is important in responding appropriately to your child's anger.
- ☑ You are partnered with your child in finding appropriate outlets to express any lingering angry feelings. You help your child pass through these angry feelings to reach a calmer place.
- ☑ You use anticipatory strategies to work with your child's feelings before the angry situations arise. These strategies include: listening more carefully to your child's feelings, expanding your family's feeling vocabulary, increasing one-on-one time, reading relevant books, and practicing feeling notes.
- ☑ You use anticipatory strategies to work with your child's behavior before the angry situations arise. These strategies include: encouragement for your child's using words to express feelings, rehearsals to practice appropriate responses to angry feelings, using the Slow-Medium-Fast Game to increase impulse control, creating an Anger Box, and using stress reduction exercises daily.
- ☑ You encourage your child in non-angry moments when they use appropriate words and appropriate behavior in expressing their feelings, especially their angry feelings. In non-angry moments, you support their use of their words to express their feelings.

IN-THE-MOMENT WORDS, STRATEGIES & TECHNIQUES

As a parent, you need to be emotionally distanced, and not actively engaged in a power struggle, to be effective in helping your child with those difficult situations involving intensely angry feelings. This is not always easy. Having a structure or model for a reference in hot moments can be very helpful. The A-B-C-C Anger Model helps you help your child learn to put their angry feelings into verbal expressions and helps you be partnered with your child around their angry feelings and angry behavior.

A-B-C-C Anger Model

- 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.

The A-B-C-C Anger Model can be that model for guiding in-the-moment words, strategies and techniques. It is suggested 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.

Rehearsing this A-B-C-C Anger Model is very helpful in hot moments. 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, you know that you will have another opportunity to use this model again within a short time. Guaranteed, you will have plenty of real-life angry opportunities and real-life chances to practice and use this model with your young child!

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."

A=ACKNOWLEDGE AND ACCEPT ANGRY FEELINGS

It is important to acknowledge and accept your child's angry feelings. Focusing on the words angry, frustrated and disappointed in these moments can be helpful. By verbalizing these feelings, you are modeling putting feelings into words. It is helpful to use as calm a voice as possible so that you are lowering the intensity of the moment and so that you are modeling using calm words.

Your child may not know what they are feeling. They may not have words for their feelings, especially in high-adrenaline moments. By putting words to their feelings, you are helping your child parse out their feelings, label their feelings, and feel accepting of their feelings. Angry feelings are often uncomfortable feelings; your child needs reassurance that it's okay to be mad. Often young children feel angry and then feel bad about themselves that they feel angry— a double whammy. Accepting your child's angry feelings makes it easier to work with your child's angry feelings.

Always try to do *feelings* first. It is important that you listen to your child's feelings (see Developing a Third Ear from [Part 1](#)) and address the feelings first, before you set a limit. Children are like adults in that we all want to be heard and understood. Often understanding and verbalizing your child's feelings is a crucial part of your exchange; once your child feels heard and understood, it is often easier for your young child to move from their angry stance and to calm somewhat.

It is important to realize that accepting the feelings is NOT accepting the behavior. Once again, you are distinguishing between your child's angry feelings and their angry behavior.

Since the ultimate goal is your child's putting their angry feelings into words, this acknowledgement of feelings can also include appreciation for your child's words, if they used words.

- ☑ *"You seem angry, Faith. I can understand that you want my attention when I am on my cell phone and you don't want to wait."*
- ☑ *"Of course that makes you mad when your little brother takes your fire truck. I might be very, very angry, too, Hector, if that happened to me."*
- ☑ *"It seems very important to you that you have candy before breakfast. I hear how frustrated you are when I say I won't give you candy for breakfast. Liam, I like that you put your angry feelings into words and screamed, 'Give me candy.' Your words are great. They help me know what you want. Also, it helps me hear you when you use your softer voice."*
- ☑ *"Hailey, I can understand that you might be disappointed that I am feeding the baby when you want to play."*

B=BEHAVIOR—SET LIMITS OR OFFER ENCOURAGEMENT

It is important to set clear, firm behavioral limits. Know where your child is on the [Six Levels of Angry Expression](#) so that you can recognize and speak to current progress while also encouraging more progress. For example, if your child has been hitting you and then chooses to hit the couch pillows instead, that is progress. Certainly this is not perfect behavior, but their behavior of hitting the pillows shows tremendous control.

There is a hierarchy of behaviors in terms of expressing angry feelings. It is important that you realize where your child has been on this hierarchy and where on this hierarchy their current angry behavior resides. Is your child's angry behavior, though not totally appropriate, exhibiting progress? Is your child using a more mature level of expressing their angry feelings? Think progress, not perfection. Changing angry behavior takes time and patience on both your parts.

It is relevant here to review the Six Levels of Angry Expressions from [Part 1](#). There is a hierarchy of how children express their angry feelings, starting with the most primitive expressions and moving toward the more mature, more socially-appropriate expressions. As a child moves through each level, more and more impulse control is needed. It is important to recognize this hierarchy since each level indicates more maturity and your child's progress within the hierarchy needs to be noticed and acknowledged. Parents often expect a young child to transition from hitting to using words. This is unrealistic; impulse control and mastering angry feelings takes time, often many months or even years, and it is important to recognize the interim progress of your child until your child only uses appropriate words to express anger.

The biggest developmental leap is when a child moves from physical expression of angry feelings to non-physical expression of angry feelings. This is HUGE progress and may take a good deal of time to solidify for your young child. Once your child makes this leap to verbal expression, you can slowly refine the appropriateness of the verbal expression over time. (See [Physical Aggression at Home and in the Classroom](#) later in Part 2.)

Six Levels Of Angry Expression

- Level 1. Physical Expression—Aggression upon a Person: A child expresses their anger by using physical aggression upon another person's body, such as biting, hitting, kicking, pinching, choking, scratching, pulling hair, squeezing, or hitting with an object.
- Level 2. Physical Expression—Aggression upon a Person's Possessions/Creations: A child expresses their anger by physically destroys another person's creation or possession, such as ripping up a painting, destroying a castle, or breaking a fire truck.
- Level 3. Physical Expression—No Physical Contact: A child expresses their anger in a physical manner, but without any physical contact or aggression directly upon another person or their creation or possession. Examples are: temper tantrums, crying, threatening with a fist, pointing with a finger gun, jumping up and down, sulking, purposefully vomiting, or holding one's breath as a threat.
- Level 4. Oral Expression—Nonverbal: A child expresses their anger using oral, but not verbal, means, such as spitting, sticking out their tongue, growling, shrieking, screaming, or giving someone the raspberry.
- Level 5. Oral Expression—Verbal, Inappropriate: A child expresses their anger using words that are inappropriate, such as: cursing, screaming words, screaming hurtful words, using hurtful words.
- Level 6. Oral Expression—Verbal, Appropriate: A child expresses their anger using words are are a socially appropriate expression of angry feelings.

It is very important to recognize that your child may need to experience each level and that moving to another less primitive, more appropriate, level is progress—not perfection, but definite progress. If your child has been hitting and then your child begins screaming instead of hitting, it is important to recognize and speak to that progress. If you tell your child not to scream, then you have cut off that more mature outlet—which is actual progress from hitting—and, since that level of expression has not been accepted, your child may revert to less mature, more physical expressions of angry feelings.

Your response to your child's anger depends on where their angry behavior or angry words are on the six levels of expression of anger. Once again, It is very important to know that the biggest developmental leap is from Level 1 to any higher level. At Level 2 and above, your child is showing a great deal of impulse control by not acting out hurtfully on someone's body. It is important in setting any necessary limits that any angry behaviors at Level 2 or above also be accompanied by positive encouragement as to your child's *"Great control in being gentle with people's bodies!"*

C=CHANNEL ANGER INTO OUTLETS: NOTES, IMAGINATION, CHOICES, EXERCISE

Certainly there may need to be consequences or repairs made for any damage that occurs in angry situations. The reparations can be actual tending to a hurt person or rebuilding a castle, or the repairs can take the form of healing a social relationship. Those issues will be discussed in the [Consequences](#) section.

In terms of angry feelings, your 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. Channeling your child's angry feelings into socially appropriate outlets can be very important to help your child pass through their angry feelings. Often once you and your child have settled upon a technique for releasing their angry feelings, that technique will work in most angry situations. If you have found a technique that helps your child release their angry feelings, go with that proven technique.

The [Anger Box](#) section from Part 1 discusses possible techniques to practice and use in hot moments to help your child release their angry feelings. Since it is sometimes challenging for us to remember these techniques in hot moments, an easy memory key for recalling some of these possibilities is N-I-C-E: Notes-Imagination-Choices-Exercise.

N-I-C-E: NOTES-IMAGINATION-CHOICES-EXERCISE

Notes

- Write a [Feeling Note](#) with your child.

Imagination

- Use your imagination to find a cathartic outlet for your child. The phrase "I wonder..." can be a productive way to engage a child's imagination. "I wonder...." is less confrontational as it does not require an answer, but it can spur a child to action.
- "I hear that you are sad that your friend can't come over. 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 have to get your hair shampooed now. I know how you hate getting your head wet. 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 that there is no school today and that you can't play with your friends. I see your angry face. Great control with your body, Atticus—you are being so gentle with my body and your sister's body. I am wondering how an angry T-Rex might stomp and growl?"*

Choices

- Sometimes giving your child choices may help them with their angry feelings. Giving a child choices can empower them and help them feel more in control.
- "I know that you are angry that you can't have candy before dinner. Moms are not for hitting. Moms are for hugging. We need to find something else to do with your angry feelings. What do you want to do with your angry feelings? Should we look in the Angry Box? Sophie, you choose."*
- "You are still mad that you had to turn off the DVD player. 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

- ☑ Your child's moving their body can help release some of the angry feelings.
- ☑ *"You are still sooo angry that Mom has to work late and you won't see her tonight. Carla, it's great that you used your words and told her that you were angry over the phone. You still seem angry. Do you want to punch your pillow?"*
- ☑ *"Jose, You are angry at Jarrod for not wanting to sit next to you at snacktime. 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?"*

CONSEQUENCES: RELEVANT, BRIEF, IMMEDIATE

Consequences for any given situation with your young child should be relevant, brief, and immediate.

Often parents feel that consequences are equated with punishments—that a mistake needs to result in a situation of removing privileges or pleasures or treats. This is counter to research that has shown that, time and again, children respond more to encouragement and positive reinforcement than to punishment and deprivation.

Everybody makes mistakes. People, both young and old, grow and learn from mistakes. It is important to approach all situations with your child, especially hot moments, as opportunities for growing and learning. What is to be learned in this situation? How can your child grow from this experience? How can you grow from this experience as a parent? It is important that you come with partnership and compassion to these conflict situations.

Big question: How can we make this situation right? If someone's body has been hurt, how can we help them heal? If someone's feelings have been hurt, how can we help soothe them? If there has been a breakdown in your social relationship with your child, how can that social break be mended? What is needed to repair you and your child's relationship?

Also, it is important to remember, to quote a National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) brochure: *"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 your child grow up is hard.

I always like to believe that, in any given situation, everyone is doing the best that they can. At any given moment, I like to believe that your child is doing the best they can. At any given moment, I like to believe that you are doing the best parenting that you can. And, at any given moment, I like to believe that I am doing the best that I can as I write this.

We are all doing our best at this moment. We are all working hard. We are in this together. We are partnered around helping your young child with their angry feelings. This helps in bringing compassion to the moment.

A discussion of consequences is complicated because there are so many possible angry situations and levels of angry expression that may be occurring, often within the same conflict. Some general guidelines and some examples are provided to cover various situations involving consequences.

It is important to note that not all angry conflict situations need consequences. If your child has not been physically aggressive or verbally aggressive and has a more self-contained, more mature level of response, such as crying or sulking, then there is no need for consequences, but rather for instruction and further rehearsals so that your child can have an appropriate voice, both the appropriate words and level of vocalization, to verbalize their feelings.

- "I see that you are very disappointed, Derek. Great control in using gentle hands and gentle feet. Can you put your disappointment into words? Can you say, 'I am disappointed.' It's not easy, but we will practice. Your feelings are important and so are your words telling me about your feelings."*
- "Yes, Shoshana, I see that you are going to your room and that you don't want to talk about how angry you are. Great control. I will check on you in a few minutes to see if you want to talk about your feelings and put your anger into words."*

Consequences are needed if there has been some harm involving your child and a peer or sibling or you. This harm can be physical to someone's body or the destruction of someone's creation or social damage to your child's relationship with another person. If there are things that are hurt—bodies or possessions or relationships—then there needs to be repair. Consequences should repair damage, not inflict punishment. Consequences should be relevant, brief, and immediate.

If your child is still so full of feeling that they cannot talk about the situation, then it is important that you employ the techniques involved in the [Anger Box](#) or [C=Channel: N-I-C-E](#) so that your child can gain some catharsis from their feelings and eventually you can revisit the angry situation. This may be a minute later, ten minutes later or several hours later.

One important goal in conflict resolution is about communication, not simply the resolution of a specific problem. Other goals in conflicts are to set behavioral limits, to be sure that each person has had an opportunity to speak, and that each person has had an opportunity to be heard. Each person needs a voice.

Relevant

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

It is important to realize what was breached or broken or eroded in the situation and what needs to be repaired. If there was physical damage inflicted, then the damage needs to be repaired. For instance, if your child injures you or another person or someone's creation, your child needs to verbally address and tend to the injured child's body or destroyed creation and try to help repair that; in this case, there will often be a rift in the social relationship and that also needs to be tended to in terms of feelings communicated between the two people involved.

If your child has not been physically aggressive but has been verbally aggressive, then the reparation needs to be with your child's social relationship with a peer or with you. In this case, feelings need to be addressed to repair the breach in the relationship.

More appropriate angry responses need to be suggested and rehearsed.

Brief

Sometimes parents can forget how time moves much differently, much more slowly, for children than for adults. An interesting guide for understanding time concepts for children is to compare your age and your child's age. Suppose you are 33 and your child is 3—you are 11 times older than your child. What is 24 hours in your child's life is what 11 days would feel like to you as an adult.

Often when parents try to set limits or consequences for a child, the time frame is very incongruent with child development. To ask a child to not use a disputed toy for an entire day is not allowing for your child's time concept. To ask your child to share a doll for an hour is even asking a lot for most young children; by the end of the hour your child may not even remember the conflictual incident.

It is important that consequences be brief so that they are congruent with your child's concept of time and allow for your child's memory capacity.

Immediate

Given the above discussion of your child's concept of time, it is important that any consequence be immediate. Using the consequence that six hours from now they will only have two books read at bedtime instead of the usual three will be long disassociated from the current conflict situation. Children have limited understanding of cause and effect; if consequences are immediate, then the cause and effect connection can be more easily understood.

A-B-C-C EXAMPLES

Example #1: Hitting another Child (Level 1. Physical Aggression Upon a Person)

SITUATION: Your young child hits another child when that child takes away the book your child is reading.

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 your child being the physical aggressor as a means of seeking negative attention is diminished. Then turn your attention to your child.
- "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."*

DISCUSSION OF RESPONSE

- A=Acknowledge and Accept Feelings. There is a labeling and an acknowledgement and acceptance of the angry feelings.
- B=Behavior—Set Limits or Offer Encouragement. Limits are set. Suggestions are made for more appropriate behavior in future angry situations.
- C=Channel anger. No possible re-channeling was suggested. If your child is too angry to talk with, Anger Box techniques or [N-I-C-E](#) (Notes-Imagination-Choices-Exercise) can be used for catharsis prior to talking.
- C=Consequences. A child's body was hurt. You are suggesting ways to ease the child's pain and ways to repair the relationship through talking. If hitting is a frequent concern, rehearsals are needed every hour for using words. See [Detailed Plan for Waging Peace](#). If hitting is a frequent concern, it is imperative that many times an hour your child be caught being good and using their hands appropriately.

"I like your gentle hands as you are having snack next to your friend."

"Hands are for holding."

"Hands are for building blocks. Great hands"

"Hands are for painting. Good job."

"Hands are for gentle touches. Your little brother loves those gentle strokes on his cheek. Great control."

Example #2: Hitting a Parent; Channeling using N-I-C-E (Level 1. Physical Aggression Upon a Person)

SITUATION

It is 8:44am on Tuesday morning and your young son Daniel is watching a Barney DVD. You need to leave for preschool at 8:45am. You turn off the Barney DVD. Daniel starts kicking you and hitting you and screaming, "I hate you! I hate you! I want Barney! I want Barney!"

Note: Avoiding this situation would be helpful. Giving a child a few minutes warning before the transition to preschool might help or be more careful to time the DVD so that it doesn't interfere with leaving time.

RESPONSE

- "You seem very, very, very, very angry with me." You very gently hold your child's hands and feet 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.'"*
- Note: "Should we write a note to Barney and tell him goodbye until after nursery school?" or*
- Imagination: "I wonder...what would Barney do if he were really angry?" or*
- Choices: "Do you want to rest the Barney DVD on the DVD player or on the counter to finish watching when you get home from school? Or do you want to do some angry running around the tree out front? I wonder if you can run around it 10 times or 25 times without stopping, the way you did when you were angry yesterday? Here's your coat."*
- Exercise: "I feel like running to the car. Should we have a race and see who can get their coat on first and be the car race winner? Here I go--see if you can catch me."*

DISCUSSION OF RESPONSE

- A=Acknowledge and Accept Feelings. Angry feelings were acknowledged and accepted.
- B=Behavior—Set Limits or Offer Encouragement. A strong limit was set concerning physical aggression. If necessary, use gentle restraint (gently hold their wrists or ankles) to stop your child from hitting or kicking you. (If kicking is a concern, a consequence for kicking is having your child remove their shoes—kicking usually hurts too much without shoes, so that behavior is altered.) When children hit or kick their parents, they feel too powerful in a very uncomfortable way; gently restraining a child is actually helping them feel safer.

I always feel a little uncomfortable restraining a child, even gently, when they are out of control and attacking me, so I usually talk about how I feel. This models putting feelings into words and keeps the communication channels open even in the midst of conflict. I might say, *"I am not comfortable holding your wrists, but I can't let you hurt me. When you have more control, then I can let go and we can talk. It's your choice—when you control yourself, then I will let your wrists free."*

- C=Channel Anger. There were details offered on how to re-channel the angry feelings so that your child can release those feelings and you two can then communicate more easily about your child's anger. You are partnering with your child about how to release their angry feelings.
 - N—Notes: A feeling note was offered.
 - I—Imagination: The Barney connection was encouraged through fantasy.
 - C—Choices: Your child was presented with choices, so that perhaps they could feel more in control in the situation.
 - E—Exercise: Run out those angry feelings!
- C=Consequences. As in Example # 1, if hitting is a frequent concern, rehearsals are needed every hour for using words. See [Detailed Plan for Waging Peace](#). If hitting is a frequent concern, it is imperative that many times an hour your child be caught being good and using their hands appropriately. See [Example #1](#) above for phrases for encouragement.

Example #3: Destroying a Castle (Level 2. Physical Aggression Upon a Person's Creations)

SITUATION

Your child was excited about grandma coming for a visit. Then she couldn't come and your child was so disappointed and angry they threw a temper tantrum and destroyed their brother's block castle.

RESPONSE

- 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 brother rebuild his castle."*
- For an older child: *"Yes, Grandma did say that she was coming over today and now she can't come. You seem angry that she won't be coming to play Candyland with you. But your brother's castle shouldn't be destroyed. Use your words. 'I am angry at Grandma.' 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 your brother about your feelings as we build. If you would like, later we can write a note to your grandma."*

DISCUSSION OF RESPONSE

- A=Acknowledge and Accept Feelings. There is an acknowledgement and acceptance of your child's anger.
- B=Behavior—Set Limits or Offer Encouragement. Limits are set on behavior and suggestions offered for using words.
- C=Channel Anger. The choice of a short break or dealing with the consequences immediately is offered. If your child is still very angry, you can use the [Anger Box](#) for techniques to dissipate your child's anger so that you can then work with it more easily.
- C=Consequences. The castle was destroyed. The relevant, brief, immediate consequence is to help rebuild the castle. Communication about the feelings is also included. A possible feeling note to brother and/or grandma may be helpful. There should be rehearsals of 30 seconds each several times a day in which the phrase "I'm MAD!" or "I'm angry!" is practiced.

Example #4: Threatening with a Fist (Level 3. Physical Expression—No Physical Contact)

SITUATION

A child on the playground pushes your child down. Your child approaches that child and raises a fist to that child.

RESPONSE

- "You are soo, sooo angry. Great control. You have raised your fist but you are being gentle with your friend's body. Great control. Use your words. Can you say, 'I'm angry!'"
- A= You have identified and acknowledged and accepted your child's angry feelings.
- B=No behavioral limits are needed. Your child used control.
- C=You provided alternative strategies for expressing anger. You may need to help your child run or slide or swing out their angry feelings on the playground if they are still upset.
- C=No immediate consequences are needed. The feelings involved in the interaction should be discussed. Also, you catch your child using their words in many, many situations and you give them positive feedback for that. You may do a rehearsal several times a day, also.

Example #5: Jumping and Screaming (Level 4. Physical Expression—No Physical Contact and Level 5. Oral Expression-Non-Verbal, Inappropriate)

SITUATION

Your young child wants a candy snack thirty minutes before dinner. Your child starts jumping up and down and jumping up and down and screaming.

RESPONSE

- "You seem very, very, very frustrated that you can't have candy 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.....Dinner is in 30 minutes. You can help me set the table or you can read a book to me while I cook or we can do a dinner dance while we finish fixing dinner. Those are your choices."*
- Your child persists in their screaming and yelling. You say, "You seem very, very frustrated. Let's add a page to your [Temper Tantrum Book](#)—you draw and I'll write for you what is making you mad. Or should we go to the [Anger Box](#) and see what we can do about your angry feelings?"*

DISCUSSION OF RESPONSE

- A=Angry feelings were acknowledged and accepted. The intensity was addressed ("very, very angry"). It helps to address the intensity if your child is intense.
- B=Behavioral limits were not needed. Guidance was provided
- C=Channeling the angry energy was suggested: Notes-Imagination-Choices-Exercise were all offered
- C=Immediate consequences were not necessary as there were no physical expressions or oral expressions that created a rift in your relationship with your child. You catch your child using their words in many, many situations and you give them positive feedback for that. You may do a rehearsal several times a day, also.

Example #6: "Poophead!" (Level 5 . Oral Expression—Verbal, Inappropriate)

SITUATION

Your young child is screaming "Poophead" at their friend.

RESPONSE

- "I hear you screaming 'Poophead' at your friend. You seem disappointed that he doesn't want to play with you. That was great control—you were gentle with his body. Great control. Let's try saying, 'I'M MAD!' Let's talk with your friend about how you are both feeling."*

DISCUSSION OF RESPONSE

- A=There was an acknowledgement and acceptance of your child's feelings.
- B=You addressed your child's physical behavior. Since your child exhibited impulse control, it is important to acknowledge that control.
- C=If your child is still feeling very intense in their anger, then you can use one or more of the techniques from the [Anger Box](#).
- C=Your child's choice of words may have caused some ill-will with his friend. The consequence is in how to repair that relationship. Suggesting that your child talk to your friend about what they are both feeling is the first step toward healing that relationship. This consequence is relevant (how to fix the friendship), brief (short talking and listening time between the two friends), and immediate (talking either then or after a few minutes cooling-off period). Rehearsals of 30 second duration several times during the day may help guide your child's language to more socially appropriate words. You can strategize with your child on how they can say, "I'm mad!" or "I'm angry!" for the next angry episode with a friend.

Example # 7: Putting Angry Feelings into Words (Level 6. Oral Expression—Verbal, Appropriate)

SITUATION

Your child and their friend have had a playdate and it is time for the playdate to end. Your child is furious that the play can't continue. Your child says, "I am so mad. I want Raphael to stay and play."

RESPONSE

- "I really like how you put your feelings into words. Great control. Gentle hands. Gentle words. Great control. Let's come up with a plan to have Raphael over again soon."*
- Your child is still upset. You offer a socially appropriate outlet. *"After Raphael leaves, we'll...look in your [Anger Box](#)...write a [note](#) to Raphie...play with your action figures or read [The Temper Tantrum Book](#)...or run around the living room 20 times to run out those angry feelings."*

DISCUSSION OF RESPONSE

- A=Angry feelings are acknowledged and accepted.
- B=No behavioral limit is needed. Encouragement is offered.
- C=Notes-Imagination-Choices-Exercise are suggested to play through the feelings.
- C=No consequences are needed, as your child handled their angry feelings respectfully, using gentle hands and gentle words. Continued encouragement for putting feelings into words is always supportive and helpful for your young child.

NO Time-Outs

For some reason, time-outs were the discipline flavor of the 1990s and that flavor still lingers on. 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 your 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.

SHAME

In group situations, giving a child a time-out is shaming that child. None of us send our child to homecare, daycare or school to be shamed. All you have to do is look at a child's face who has been timed-out in a group situation and you can see how bad they are feeling about themselves. They might as well have one of those old-fashioned dunce caps on their head. Shaming a child teaches them nothing; in fact, if you were ever shamed as a child you may remember being angry at the adult or angry at yourself. Time-outs often cause more angry feelings and can be counter-productive.

YOU CAN'T LEARN SOCIAL SKILLS IN ISOLATION

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

TIME-OUTS DON'T TEACH

When your child leaves the time-out chair and a similar conflict situation arises, your child has no additional skills to use in that situation. There has been no talk or rehearsal to increase your child's behavioral repertoire for the next time your child feels angry or upset. There has been no practice to provide some additional behavioral and neurological pathways so that your child has new choices when a conflict arises again.

CONFUSION?

Very often children who are sent to time-out are not clear why. If you ask your child, sometimes they will be uncertain or confused about the behavior or words that caused the time-out. If this is the case, how can your child know what to do next time? Young children need specific directions. It is important to remember and understand, once again from an NAEYC brochure: "Young children do not always understand and remember the rules."

PARTNERSHIP

There is no partnering in the time-out chair. Your child is there by themselves to tough out whatever. We have an important role to provide guidance to young children, especially in high-adrenaline moments.

WHO NEEDS THE TIME-OUT: YOU OR YOUR CHILD?

Let's be honest here—often when children are timed-out, it is the adult that needs the time-out! 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:

- Your 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 kitchen or the living room? 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 your child's angry feelings. Taking some time and space apart may help you and your 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. The cooling off period can be a re-centering so that there can be some important learning and growing around angry situations in which you and your child are partnered in learning social skills and how to best express angry feelings.

NO Spanking

Spanking is a hot topic. Spanking is complicated. Spanking or hitting on the butt or shaking a child's shoulders can mean very different things to very different people. Different families have different guidelines regarding hitting children. Different cultures have different guidelines regarding hitting children. Some cultures encourage spanking children, some cultures use caning for disciplining children, some cultures accept light taps on a child's backside. In some cultures parents are thought of as neglectful and weak if they do not use physical means to discipline children.

It feels important to explore your own personal experiences with spanking or hitting children, as those get carried from our families of origin, our growing-up families, to our own family. This isn't easy, but it is important.

I have feelings about spanking from both a personal and a professional standpoint.

Personally, I remember being spanked as a child. My pride was hurt. I felt humiliated. What I felt was intense anger at my father or my mother. What I learned was to be more secretive and not to trust my parents to understand me or help me. I didn't learn any of the lessons that they tried to teach me by spanking me.

What I can say about spanking or hitting professionally is on another level.

First of all, when your goal for your child is for them to put their angry feelings into words, then it is hard to justify we adults not putting our angry feelings into words, but putting our angry feelings into hits or slaps. If a parent is still working on impulse control, then how can we expect more impulse control from a child? "One parent is worth a thousand teachers" says an ancient Chinese proverb. This speaks to the power of modeling—what we do as parents is far more powerful than what we say. If we want children who don't hit, then we need to be parents who don't hit. If we want children who follow [Rule #1](#): Everyone is Gentle with Everyone's Body, then we need to follow the rule as well.

Secondly, my concern is empirical. When I work with families, if a child has been hit or spanked by a parent, then within the next day or so that child will often hit either a peer, a sibling, a parent, or a teacher. In my experience, without judgment but with much observation, if a child is hit, then that child will hit soon after. (Important note: I am definitely not saying that every child who hits has been hit. I am saying that a child who hits will very likely then hit. There is a definite distinction here.)

So much of the work with your child concerning anger management issues is about impulse control. So much of the work with your child concerning anger management issues is about helping your child learn to put their angry feelings into words. It is extremely important that the adults in your child's life model impulse control and verbalize challenging feelings. Spanking is counter to these goals and counter to this model for anger management for your child.

PHYSICAL AGGRESSION AT HOME & IN THE CLASSROOM: A DETAILED PLAN FOR WAGING PEACE

Guidelines: Biting, Hitting, Kicking, Temper Tantrums & Hurtful Words

It is important that you have read [Part 1: Your Child's Angry Feelings And Angry Behavior](#) and the previous sections of [Part 2: Anger In-The-Moment: Words, Skills, And Techniques](#) to provide a rich and full context for the following suggested plans.

One-year-olds bite and hit and kick. Two-year-olds bite and hit and kick. Less often, three-year-olds bite and hit and kick. Four-year-olds who bite and hit and kick are starting to push the envelope. Your child explores their world through their senses, initially through their mouths and then, as they mature, through their hands. This oral and tactile means of learning comes naturally to your young child and is often your child's first mode of communication in high-adrenaline moments.

One of the most challenging issues in working with your young child is to help them control their impulses, be they oral or tactile. Helping your child put their physical expressions of anger and frustration into words is a huge undertaking requiring a huge developmental step. This takes time and patience and adherence to a specific plan that focuses on changing specific behaviors.

A 21-Step Detailed Plan for a Young Child Who is Hitting at Childcare

1. WAGE PEACE

When I work with children who are physically aggressive at home or in a classroom situation, I think of our work as waging peace. That is the kind of focus and dedication that is needed to guide your child toward more mature, more socially appropriate behavior. It takes a great deal of time, effort, focus and dedication to change a child's behavior. We adults must modify our behavior—and this can be very challenging—in order to modify a child's behavior. This can be accomplished by having specific guidelines and a specific plan.

2. DON'T LABEL YOUR CHILD

Don't call your child "a biter" or "a kicker." Labeling your child makes it too easy to ignore the important details and not look closely at each situation. Your child is going through a phase where your child sometimes bites and sometimes kicks—that is a phase that you will help move them beyond.

3. NOTICE DETAILS, DETAILS, AND MORE DETAILS

Re-shaping challenging behavior is in the details. You and the childcare staff need to have written goals for desired behavior and a specific plan—what everyone will do and what everyone will say—in given situations.

Behavior charts in the classroom aren't helpful for changing a child's behavior, although some parents find them helpful in understanding their child's behavior. Usually they are too general, without specifics of behavior, to be of use. To say that a child had a good day or a bad day is not helpful—often your child doesn't even know what behavior is expected of them or what they did wrong and what does good and bad mean? The really helpful information is in the small details...what occurred, what precipitated it, who was involved, what was the time of day and what was happening in the classroom, where were the teachers, etc. What was the frequency of the behavior, the intensity of the behavior, the duration of the behavior?

It is important to know all of this information. It will help with many issues, including: is this negative attention-getting? And what can be done to provide positive attention from you or your child's teacher to offset possible negative attention-getting? Is there a pattern here that would be helpful? What helped deal with this behavior? What didn't help with this behavior?

4. IDENTIFY YOUR CHILD'S POSSIBLE TRIGGERS

Try to identify possible [triggers](#), as outlined in Part 1 of this article so that you may be able to identify a pattern in the behavior. This allows you to anticipate a situation or restructure a situation so that the triggers will not be present. For instance, if your child refuses to eat breakfast on some mornings, but then hits in daycare when they may be hungry and out of resources, you can bring a Ziploc bag of car snacks or daycare snacks for your child to munch on throughout the morning to avoid a blood sugar drop that may lead to aggression.

5. EXAMINE YOUR CHILD'S PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT AT HOME & AT SCHOOL

Young children are very responsive to their physical and visual and sensory environment. At home or in the classroom, are the lights too bright and overstimulating? In the block corner in the classroom, is it too much out of view so that supervision is difficult and a teacher cannot stay on top of a situation? Are there enough tactile experiences—a sand table indoors, playdough—that a child's tactile needs are being met? Is a nearby classroom too noisy and contributing to the frustration in your child's classroom? Are there age-appropriate toys that interest your child? Is there a way to structure a physical or social situation or environment to avoid conflict situations?

6. EVALUATE YOUR CHILD'S ACTIVITIES AT HOME & IN THE CLASSROOM

Is your child's school program developmentally-appropriate? (see NAEYC Developmentally Appropriate Practices brochures and books at www.naeyc.org). At childcare, is your child encouraged to participate in group activities, but allowed to choose not to participate? In addition, sometimes an adult's physical presence can calm a situation—are you or your child's teacher physically present in anticipation of certain situations that may cause problems? Is your child's schedule at home and at school alternating between quiet and busy activities? Is your child overscheduled? Does your child get enough sleep? Is the transition from home to childcare in the morning unhurried or is it stressful?

7. 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 your child tends to bite, they may be seeking oral deep pressure and may need to eat crunchy foods to satisfy some oral cravings; if this seems to be the case, you should have your child evaluated by an occupational therapist (see your pediatrician for a referral).

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—your child won't kick if it hurts them as much as it hurts the other person.

8. PROVIDE ENCOURAGEMENT EVERY 5 MINUTES!

Catch your child being good. Provide positive reinforcement. Appreciate the appropriate behavior. Constantly. Every 5 minutes. Again and again and again. When we change our behavior and response to respond in positive moments, powerful changes occur. This isn't easy, but it is necessary!

9. PROVIDE ENCOURAGEMENT EVERY 5 MINUTES!

Take charge of the power we have in changing our child's behavior. This guarantees that the temper tantrums aren't negative attention-getting.

10. PROVIDE ENCOURAGEMENT EVERY 5 MINUTES!

Again and again and again. "Gentle hands." "I like your gentle words." This requires a great deal of proactive engagement on the part of adults!

11. DEVELOP A MENTAL ANGER BOX FOR YOUR CHILD

When I taught preschool, I incorporated the [Anger Box](#) concept into my classroom, where I had a mental Anger Box in my head (a physical Anger Box would have been a sharing nightmare!). Since young children are often frustrated or angry or out-of-control, my goal was that, within the first six weeks of school start-up, I would have one technique in my mental Anger Box for each child, one proven technique that helped that particular child deal with their frustrations and provide a socially appropriate outlet so that they could pass through their angry feelings.

I soon developed a large number of items in my mental Anger Box, usually fifteen if there were fifteen children in the classroom, as each child had their own particular way of working through their anger. Once I found a specific technique that worked for a specific child, it usually became the tried-and-true strategy that was the go-to technique.

12. PRACTICE ANTICIPATORY STRATEGIES AT HOME & AT SCHOOL

Incorporate the [Slow-Medium-Fast Game](#) for impulse control throughout your child's day at home and have the staff use this game at childcare. At childcare, the Slow-Medium-Fast Game can be used during transition times, at snack time, and especially while singing and dancing at Circle Time.

13. DO 30-SECOND REHEARSALS EVERY HOUR

Once again, partner with your 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.

14. SUPERVISION

To wage peace in this situation, supervision is needed. Teachers can tag-team in 30-minute intervals. One teacher can focus on your child for 30 minutes, providing a great deal of verbal encouragement for positive behavior ("*I like your gentle hands*" "*I like the way you are using your mouth for talking*"), being a physical presence within one or two feet of your child to calm a situation or intervene before issues escalate, and providing friendly supervision if your child does not want to participate in group activities.

If tag-teaming is difficult for the staff, you may want to hire a shadow, a person who establishes a relationship with your child and can be their partner in the classroom, incorporating and implementing the words, strategies and techniques that will help change your child's behavior. Shadows can be roving staff aides or shadows can be college students or mothers of children at the school that are hired by parents; it is important that any shadow be instructed as to the detailed plan to help your child.

15. SHORTEN THE CHILDCARE DAY

For several weeks, try programming your child for success by having them be in school or daycare for a shorter day, say only one or one-and-a-half hours if it is a half-day program or only two or three hours if it is a full-day program. All the suggested interventions are more tenable for staff for a shorter period of time and the shorter day may be less stressful for your child.

It is often far easier for your child to use impulse control and deal with frustrations for a much shorter day than for a longer day. You and the staff can evaluate after two to three weeks if the shorter, less demanding childcare time is helpful and then, if warranted, you can gradually progress to a longer time in childcare.

It should also be noted that your child may have fewer resources later in the week, so your child may be able to phase into a longer day on Monday, Tuesday, and/or Wednesday, but may be more successful if Thursday and Friday remain shorter days.

16. EXERCISE IN THE MORNING BEFORE CHILDCARE.

Have your child ride their big wheel or run or climb for 30-60 minutes before going to childcare. Exercise at home or at a park on the way to school or at the school playground before going into the classroom. Allow for a few minutes of quiet transition before entering the classroom. Releasing any pent-up energy can be so helpful and lead to a quieter, less aggressive day in childcare.

17. USE ENCOURAGERS IN MODERATION, IF THEY ARE HELPFUL.

I am not a fan of using stickers, but for some children stickers are effective encouragers. It is important that, if stickers are used, the encourager is clearly defined. It is also important that your child's process as well as your child's progress/behavior be rewarded, so that your child's attempts to change their behavior are recognized. Your child should 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 your child. All encouragers should be used in moderation.

18. EVALUATE WHETHER YOUR CHILD NEEDS TO BE PICKED UP BY A PARENT

Sometimes, after trying numerous strategies, the intensity of the consequences needs to be increased. A decision can be made and shared with the child that *"The next time you choose to hurt your friend, you are choosing to go home"* and have the child picked up from school by a parent. This should be very carefully considered, as for some children having their parent pick them up early from childcare and spend time with them is positive reinforcement and not a consequence that is effective in deterring their behavior.

19. RE-STRATEGIZE AFTER 2-3 WEEKS OF WAGING PEACE

Careful attention should be paid in terms of the question: Has there been progress? If there has been no change in the frequency, intensity, or duration of the physical aggression, there needs to be re-strategizing of the plan. Also, some serious concerns need to be addressed: perhaps your child is not well-matched to the childcare program and/or perhaps a professional needs to be consulted to work with the child in the classroom and/or outside the classroom.

20. EXPECT PROGRESS, NOT PERFECTION

Measure progress in terms of changes in frequency, intensity, and duration.

21. TRANSGRESSIONS ARE OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING & 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."

AGENDA FOR A PARENT-CHILDCARE STAFF MEETING FOR DEALING WITH PHYSICAL AGGRESSION

All of the previously discussed guidelines, words, strategies, and techniques from Part 1 and Part 2 are used to wage peace with a child who is hitting. The following outline provides an agenda for a parent-childcare staff meeting to establish a detailed plan for dealing with physical aggression in the childcare setting that is consistent with the plan being implemented at home.

1. The Child
 - a. Special Needs/Services/Assessments: Share these with childcare staff
 - b. [Triggers](#): Allergies? Medication? Nutrition? Family Stress?
 - c. [Home strategies](#): rehearsals, more exercise, more one-on-one with parents, [Slow-Medium-Fast Game](#), [books](#) about angry feelings, [feeling notes](#)
2. Childcare Strategies: Review Detailed Plan
 - a. Goal: Put angry feelings into words; physical aggression to verbal expression
 - b. Identify triggers: time of day, particular child, section of classroom, activity?
 - c. Positive encouragement for proper use of hands/mouth/feet—every 5 minutes: *“Gentle hands/mouth/feet.” “Great control.” “I like how you are using your hands/mouth/feet for ____.”*
 - d. [Exercise](#) or stress reduction exercises offered frequently
 - e. Close supervision at block corner and on playground
 - f. Close supervision at transition times: before, during, and after transitions
 - g. Transgressions are opportunities for learning: frequent rehearsals
 - h. Shorter day?
 - i. Tag team or shadow for close supervision?
 - j. [Note progress](#) in terms of changes in frequency, intensity, duration; progress may be weekly rather than daily given the ups and downs that can occur day-to-day
 - k. Daily communication with parents: phone, notes, email, or voicemail, with many details

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PART 2 SUMMARY

Anger happens. The goal for your child is to put their angry feelings into words. A parent's goal is to be emotionally partnered with their young child to help their child acknowledge and accept their angry feelings. A parent's goal is also to be behaviorally partnered with their young child to help them channel their angry behavior into socially appropriate outlets.

The [A-B-C-C Anger Model](#) is an in-the-moment strategy used to help you help your child channel their angry feelings into appropriate verbal expressions and physical outlets. The A-B-C-C Anger Model helps your child progress through the [Six Levels of Angry Expression](#). Time-outs and spanking are not recommended strategies.

A [21-step detailed plan](#) for waging peace with your child's physical aggression, both at home and in the classroom, is important to help your child learn to express their angry feelings with words. [An agenda](#) was presented for a meeting between parents and childcare staff to help in providing classroom strategies to work with physical aggression, strategies that are consistent with strategies being used at home.

It is not easy for your young child to learn to manage their anger, but with your help with in-the-moment words, strategies, and techniques, you can partner with your child to help them put their angry feelings into words.

FAQ

Q. My child is being bullied at daycare. What should they do? What can I do?

Bullying is an adult problem. Adults need to be very present and very aware of bullying situations and they need to intervene with strong limits on what is acceptable behavior between children. Bullying often occurs during free play time or during outside play, so staff need to be very aware and present before situations arise.

If your child is being bullied, it is important that adults intervene and stop the bullying, even if this requires a great deal of supervision. If your child is being bullied, it is also important that you do rehearsals with your child and encourage their strong words so that they can stand up to the bully. "NO!" or "GO AWAY!" or "LEAVE ME ALONE!" are good phrases to rehearse with your child when you reenact a scene. Bullies stop when there is push-back from the child being bullied, so it is important that your child has a strong voice to defend themselves.

Q. My child is a bully at school. What should they do? What can I do?

Once again, bullying is an adult problem. Adults need to be totally tuned into potential problem times and be sure to provide adequate supervision to minimize the possibilities of a bullying situation. Playground time is an especially important time for supervision.

If your child is doing the bullying, it is important that you work with your child on putting their feelings into words. If your child is doing verbal bullying, it is important that you examine your child's situation to see if, somewhere in their environment, they are being bullied and that there is bullying behavior they are modeling. It is not unusual for children who are being bullied by siblings to then bully other children. In this case, it is important that you intervene and not allow bullying at home. If there is no sibling bullying, then explore your child's contacts and try to determine if another relative or friend or neighbor is acting in a bullying manner toward your child.

Some power-tripping behavior can occur naturally in young children, especially around four years of age when children are becoming even more social with their peers and they are into testing their mettle. It is the intensity and the frequency and the style of the bossiness that may turn power-tripping into bullying behavior. Regardless, this issue is still an adult issue and requires strong limits and interventions from adults.

Q. My child is fine at daycare—not at all aggressive—and then he comes home and beats up on his little brother or tries to hit me. What is going on? What should I do?

It is hard for young child to be good for a solid three, four, five or six hours (it's hard for us adults to be good for hours and hours!) Young children have limited resources and these resources may be used up in behaving appropriately at group care. This behavior can sometimes be considered the behavioral cost of childcare.

Be sure that the childcare program is a good match for your child and be sure that there is no bullying in the childcare situation. [See our article](#) on choosing the right school or childcare for your child.

Easing your child's transition to home may be helpful to the situation: try to provide physical exercise for your child after picking them up at childcare—either at the playground at daycare, at a park on the way home, or at playspace or lawnscapes near your home. Have a healthy car snack or drink for the transition home if your child seems hungry or thirsty. Allow your child some veg time in the car or at home; some undemanding down time or screen time of 30 minutes can be helpful in unwinding and becoming more grounded at home. A ritual or ritualized activity can help in this regard.

Q. My two-year-old son bit a child at preschool and broke the skin. Now they want to kick him out of school. What can I tell them to help the situation?

Age matters. Two-year-olds bite.

Bites, especially bites that break the skin, can cause a lot of anxiety and stress on parent's parts. Biting is such a primitive response that we adults often have an almost physical reaction to it.

It is important that the school review the context of the bite and the frequency of the biting. It is important that the school have a plan to re-shape this oral expression of feelings. Having a strong plan in place—and a plan for home that is consistent with a plan for school—should help with the behavior and should help calm the families involved. Following the [21-step plan](#) outlined above should help with the biting issue.

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 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.

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. This is often the mom. 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. Upping 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 use the [anticipatory strategies](#) concerning your son's feelings and behavior. It's not easy, but developing these skills 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 a child, the less impulse control and fewer verbal skills; the older a 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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