

Fighting and Aggression

What is the concern?

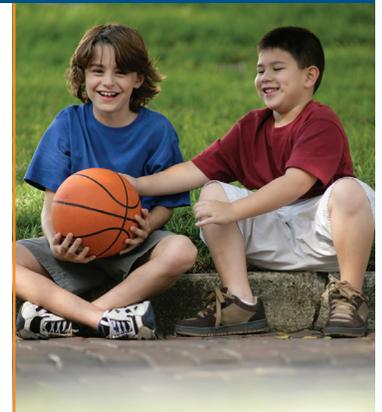
Children often fight and are aggressive. Different from the rough and tumble play that arises during pre-school years as part of pretend play, aggression involves the intent to hurt someone else. Parents can teach children safe and kind ways of solving problems and sharing without aggression.

Why do children fight or behave aggressively?

- Children can feel frustrated and angry when things do not go their way. This anger and frustration turns into aggression when they have not learned ways to control these emotions.
- They may also fight out of jealousy, competition, or retaliation, especially with brothers or sisters, or friends in their school or day care.
- Others may be aggressive to get what they want—a toy, attention, or their chance to watch TV.
- Often children fight from watching others fight. If they see parents or older children arguing or fighting or observe acts of aggression on TV or in video games, they will probably learn to do the same thing.
- Children need to learn boundaries for themselves and others. Sometimes children may become agitated or aggressive if they feel someone invaded their space.

How can I prevent aggression and fighting in children?

- Parents need to be very clear and consistent on where to draw the line between rough and tumble play and aggression. If children do not know what the rules are, they will get rougher and hurt each other.
- Explain the rules of play with clear directions. Decide on two or three very simple, clear rules for playing. For example:
 - a. Be gentle. *Show* your child how to play gently.
 - b. Share and take turns.
 - c. Keep your hands and feet to yourself.
 - d. Use a quiet, indoor voice.
 - e. Be sure to tell your child what *to* do instead of what *not* to do.
- Teach taking turns. Use activities to promote sharing and taking turns such as outdoor games and simple board games. Play games with your child to show her how to take turns.
- Encourage the behavior you want to see. When your child is playing well, sharing, and getting along, this is the time to give her positive attention. Talk about what she is doing. “I like the way you two are putting that together and playing so nicely.”
- Use rewards. You may also want to give children a special reward if they have been consistent in playing together nicely.



Tips to Remember:

- Remind children of the rules every time they play with others.
- Praise and pay attention to children for playing nicely with each other.
- Help children solve problems before fights occur.
- Tell children what to do – the behaviors you would like to see.
- Children should not observe fighting in the home or on TV or video games.

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- Help your child solve problems. Step in and help solve problems before the fighting starts. Instruct children to start taking turns if there is an argument over a toy. Praise your child for politely saying what she wants. Ask children to tell you what the problems are, what each child wants, and then suggest how to do something that is fair to everyone. For example, “Okay, everyone wants to play with the new truck. First Sheila takes it, then Tyrone. To be fair, everyone should have a turn.”
- Be aware of when your child is hungry or tired, as he may not be able to function as well. Offer a suggestion or distraction if you notice his behavior is escalating or becoming aggressive.

What should I do if my child is fighting or being aggressive?

- Again, be clear about your directions and, if necessary, send children to other areas away from each other. “Shakira, you go play over there with your toys, and Madison stay here.”
- Apply sensible consequences. If your child does not do as you have asked, use a sensible consequence that fits the situation. So, if your child has been fighting over the TV, it gets turned off for 30 minutes. If she fights over a toy, it gets put up for 15 minutes. Usually 10-15 minutes of missing an activity is enough. Give the toy or activity back after 15 minutes as long as she is not crying or fussing for the toy or activity. Return the toy or activity once the crying stops. If the problem occurs again, take away the toy or activity again but for a longer time (one hour).
- Use a brief quiet time. This involves giving the child no attention and having him sit at the edge of an activity for a short time. He must sit quietly for at least two minutes before he can come out of quiet time. If he will not sit for quiet time, then he must go to a time out. Time out involves taking your child away from a situation to a safe but boring place; he must be quiet for two minutes before he comes out of time out.
- When children hit or bite or do anything that is physically aggressive, they should be removed from the situation and must go to time out right away. While the child is in time out, turn your attention to the victim. Offer that child sympathy. After time out, the child who was aggressive must apologize to the other child. If she refuses to apologize, then she should be sent back to time out.

Tips to Remember (cont'd):

- Teach kids to share—use sensible consequences when they will not share.
- Do not ignore aggressive behavior, act immediately.
- Be consistent with your discipline and exercise quiet time or time out as necessary.
- When time out is over, return child to activity to play cooperatively.
- If these suggestions do not work, please talk with your pediatrician for more ideas.