



How to Help Your Child Stop Hitting and Pushing

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Like many parents and caregivers, you may have found yourself in a situation where, despite your best efforts, your child continues to hit and push you or other children. To begin to address this behavior, it is important to understand that your child has his own opinions and probably wants to do more things for himself, yet he may not have the language skills or impulse control to make those things happen. This experience can be frustrating for him and his first reaction might be to hit or push. Young children often express difficult emotions such as frustration, anger or embarrassment by acting out physically. Many children do not know a different way to handle difficult emotions.



Parents often feel embarrassed by this behavior and frustrated when it continues. When parents spank, laugh or ignore the hitting and pushing, they are telling their child that it is acceptable to hit and push. New behaviors that the child can use instead of hitting need to be taught and modeled by parents and caregivers. With patience and time, you can teach your child appropriate ways to handle disappointment and frustration that will allow him to feel confident and successful when playing with friends and siblings.

Backpack Connection Series

About this Series

The Backpack Connection Series was created by TACSEI to provide a way for teachers and parents/caregivers to work together to help young children develop social emotional skills and reduce challenging behavior. Teachers may choose to send a handout home in each child's backpack when a new strategy or skill is introduced to the class. Each Backpack Connection handout provides information that helps parents stay informed about what their child is learning at school and specific ideas on how to use the strategy or skill at home.

The Pyramid Model



The Pyramid Model is a framework that provides programs with guidance on how to promote social emotional competence in all children and design effective interventions that support young children who might have persistent challenging behavior. It also provides practices to ensure that children with social emotional delays receive intentional teaching. Programs that implement the Pyramid Model are eager to work together with families to meet every child's individualized learning and support needs. To learn more about the Pyramid Model, please visit ChallengingBehavior.org.

More Information

More information and resources on this and other topics are available on our website, ChallengingBehavior.org.

Try This at Home

- Read the book *Hands Are Not for Hitting* by Martine Agassi. This story helps children understand why they feel like hitting and teaches things they can do instead. Go to http://challengingbehavior.fmhi.usf.edu/docs/booknook/BookNook_hands_new.pdf where you will find many ideas you can use when reading this story with your child to help her understand how to use her hands in an appropriate way.
- Teach your child about her emotions. Notice and label a variety of feelings. "I see that you are getting angry. Your hands are in fists and your face is scrunched up! You can tell me that you are mad, but you can't hit me." To learn more about teaching emotions, go to challengingbehavior.org and read the Backpack Connection series handout titled *How to Help Your Child Understand and Label Emotions*.
- Trace your child's hands on a piece of paper and place them on the wall. Teach her to push on the paper on the wall when she is frustrated or disappointed. With enthusiasm, tell her, "You are getting out the frustration in your body! What a great way to deal with your feelings!"
- Tell your child what she can do! You can say to her, "When you are frustrated, you can scream into a pillow, push on the wall or say 'help please.'"

Practice at School

Children learn safe and healthy ways to express their emotions at school through stories, puppets or role playing. Teachers also post class rules showing children that we keep our friends, selves and toys safe. If a child hits or pushes another child at school, teachers first give attention to the child who is injured and have the other child help her feel better. This could include getting an ice pack, offering her a hug or bringing her a stuffed animal to hold. Once the injured child has been helped and everyone is calm, teachers talk to the child who hit. Together, they talk about how he was feeling and think of a different way he could have handled the situation.

The Bottom Line

Aggressive behavior, like hitting or pushing, happens when a child does not know how to handle strong emotions. While parents must tell their child that hitting and pushing are not ok, it is also important for parents to teach a new behavior that he can use instead when he feels angry, frustrated or embarrassed. Parents can help children learn new, positive ways to solve problems or express feelings before aggressive behavior is likely to occur. With practice and encouragement, children can feel confident managing their body and emotions.



ChallengingBehavior.org



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This publication was produced by the Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention (TACSEI) for Young Children funded by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), U.S. Department of Education (H326B070002) and updated by the National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations also funded by OSEP (H326B170003). The views expressed do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of the Department of Education, July 2013/January, 2018.

