



Parenting the Preschooler

Social Competence & Emotional Well-Being Fact Sheets

How do you help your child control their aggression?

Ages & Stages

PRESCCHOOLER A child who is 3 to 5 years of age.

YOUNG CHILD A child who is 0 to 8 years of age.

Minding Our Language

Families come in all shapes, sizes, and styles. A “family” may include people who are related by blood, by marriage, and by choice. “Parents” may be biological, step-, foster, adoptive, legally appointed, or something else. When we use the words “family” and “parent” in these materials, we do so inclusively and with great respect for all adults who care for and work with young people.

It is normal for preschoolers to be aggressive sometimes. Almost every child will hit, kick, grab, spit, punch, or yell now and then. When their child acts aggressively, many parents worry that the child is mean or bad. Aggressive preschoolers are not bad children; they know they should not be mean or hurt others, but they might not always be able to control their actions.

Feeling frustrated, angry, afraid, or jealous can be scary and overwhelming for young children. When they don't know how to handle these feelings they may act out. Because children often behave like the adults around them, you can help your child learn to control their aggression.

Try some of the following tips to help your child manage their aggression:

- Model good behavior by staying calm when you feel frustrated or angry.
- Help your child learn how to handle strong feelings like anger and frustration. Start by teaching them to say how they feel using words, not actions.
- Talk with your preschooler about ways to handle problems. Work together to come up with a list of things to do instead of being aggressive.
- Step in right away if you see your child being aggressive. Never ignore it, because ignoring aggression might let your child think it is okay to act that way.
- Remind your child of any limits you have set. (*“I will not let you hurt other people, pets, or other people's things.”*)
- Teach kindness by showing them the importance of saying they are sorry. Do not force your child to apologize, because you don't want them to say the words without meaning it.
- Describe the hurt or damage your child's behavior has caused. Build empathy by asking how they would feel if someone had done that to them.
- Talk about what your child could do instead of being aggressive – after they have calmed down. (*“Why did you get so mad?” “What could you have said to Stacy instead of smacking her?”*)
- Ask open-ended questions to figure out what is really bothering your child. (An open-ended question is one that requires more than a yes or no answer.)
- Limit the time your child spends watching violent or aggressive television shows or movies and playing violent games.

- If your child has been aggressive and has hurt someone or broken something, ask them how they can make the situation better.
- Encourage and reward your child's kindness.
- Talk to your family health care provider or the local health department if your child is consistently aggressive and harmful to other people or animals.

Find Out More

MSU Extension provides the following resources for parents and caregivers of preschoolers and young children at no or low cost. Be sure to check out these and other MSU Extension resources available at www.extension.msu.edu.

Extension Extras (<https://bit.ly/2LC2vdX>) – These compilations of news articles, activities, parenting tips and advice are published online Monday through Friday. The resources are designed for parents and caregivers of young children who are home all day during the novel coronavirus pandemic. Each day has a theme: Mindful Mondays, Tips on Tuesday, Working Wednesdays, Thinking Thursday, and Fun Fridays.

Extension Extras Enrichment Kits (<https://bit.ly/35QAplQ>) – These kits feature five or six early childhood activities with learning goals focused in areas such as social and emotional health, literacy, and STEM; a supply list; suggested children's books; introduction letters explaining how to use the materials; and an evaluation. The kits are available as free downloads.

Early Childhood Videos (<https://bit.ly/3ioyEkS>) – These short videos offer parents and caregivers of young children information on parenting topics. Titles include "Perspective Taking," "Family Movies," "Goals of Misbehavior," "Using Thinking and Feeling Words," "The Waiting Game," and "When Siblings Fight."

Building Early Emotional Skills (BEES) in Young Children (<https://bit.ly/38XW4Kl>) – This page provides links to a variety of free online parenting courses, workshops, and events offered by MSU Extension for parents and caregivers of young children aged 0 to 3.

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