

## Positive Parenting of Preschoolers

# Fighting and Aggression

*It is common for children to have disagreements or arguments at times. However, when children fight the risk is that someone will be hurt. Fighting and aggression range from common 'rough and tumble' play to more severe, destructive behaviour. If not dealt with early, aggression can get worse. Children may not learn better ways of behaving without help from their parents. This tip sheet gives some suggestions to help you teach your preschooler to play cooperatively and get along with others.*

## Why Do Children Fight?

Children may fight or become aggressive out of frustration or anger, when things do not go the way they want. Children may hit out at others if they do not know other ways of solving problems or have trouble saying what they want. They may also fight out of jealousy or competition, especially with their brothers and sisters.

Children may hit, kick, pull hair, push or call others names just to see what happens. Aggression usually gets a big reaction from the victim. Others may be aggressive to get what they want, such as making another child give up a toy or to get attention from their parents.

Sometimes parents are not sure where to draw the line between 'rough and tumble' play and hurtful behaviour. If the limit is unclear, it is hard for children to learn acceptable, non-hurtful ways of getting on with others and solving problems.

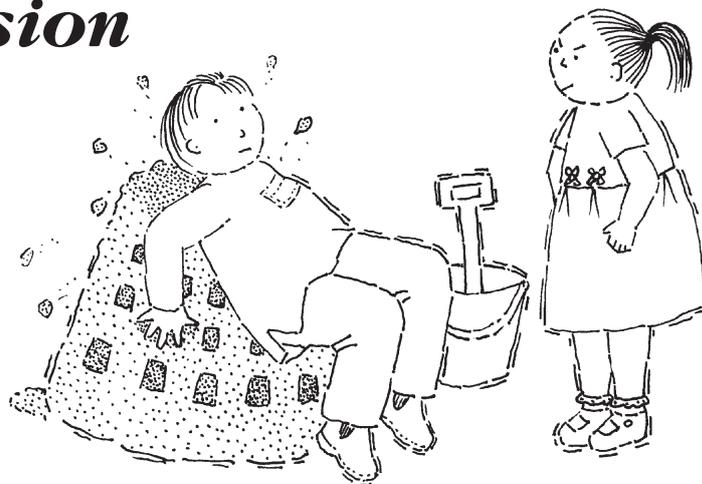
Children may learn to fight by watching others. If children see others, such as their parents, arguing or fighting they are likely to do the same when they have a problem.

## How To Encourage Cooperative Play

### Explain the Rules

Decide on two or three simple rules for playing with others and discuss them with your child. After a while your preschooler will be able to say what the rules are. Ideally, rules should tell your child what to do rather than what not to do. Here are some examples:

- Be gentle.
- Share and take turns.
- Keep your hands and feet to yourself.



## Choose Some Activities To Teach Turn-Taking

Some activities promote sharing, cooperation and turn-taking, such as ball games, board games or computer games with two players. Start by playing these games with your child to show them how to take turns.

## Encourage Children for Playing Well

When your child is playing well, sharing and cooperating with others, give them lots of attention. Talk to the children and ask questions about what they are doing—*You two are building a great castle there, how many towers will you have?* Praise the children—I like it when you three play so well together or *You're playing very gently with the others today, Brian.*

For the first few days, you may like to give your child a special reward such as a story, game, favourite drink or snack. Tell your child how pleased you are that they played well.

## Help Your Child Solve the Problem

Some children have difficulty saying what they want. You can help by giving them some words to use—*Isaac, say: Aaron you've already had a go, it's my turn now.* Praise your child for politely saying what they want.

Step in and help children solve problems before fights occur. For example, decide who can play with a toy first before children start fighting over it—*Girls, you need to share the toy. Who is going to have the first turn?* Let each child go first at different times—no favourites. If a solution is reached, praise the children for sharing and taking turns.

To teach children how to solve problems for themselves ask them what the problem is, what each child wants and what they can each do to compromise.

### ***Use Logical Consequences if Children Do Not Share***

If the problem began with one child and they refuse to do as you have asked, take the toy from them and give it to the other child. If two or more children are involved and they do not reach a solution about whose turn it is, use a consequence that fits the situation. For example, remove the toy or activity they are having trouble sharing—*Boys, you are not sharing the toy, I'm putting it away for five minutes.* After the set time, return the toy and help the children decide who will play first. Praise sharing and taking turns.

### **How To Manage Fighting**

#### ***Tell Your Child What To Do***

Always act quickly when your child fights or becomes aggressive with someone. Speak firmly and tell your child what to do. Say something like—*Sarah, stop hitting Mitchell. Keep your hands to yourself.* Praise your child if they do as you ask.

#### ***Use Quiet Time or Time-Out if Fighting Continues***

If your child does not stop fighting or being aggressive, tell them the problem and the consequence. Say something like—*Sarah, you are still hitting Mitchell. Go to quiet time.* You may need to separate children who are fighting and put more than one child into quiet time at the same time. Quiet time involves removing your attention from your child and having them sit quietly on the edge of the activity for a short time. Sit your child on a chair away from others. Tell your child that they must be quiet for two minutes before they can come out of quiet time.

If your child does not sit quietly, take them to time-out. Say something like—*You are not being quiet in quiet time, now you must go to time-out.* Time-out involves taking your child away from the situation where a problem has occurred and having them be quiet for a short time. Take your child to an uninteresting but safe room or space. Tell your child they must be quiet for two minutes before they can come out of time-out. Give this reminder even though your child might be upset or angry.

### ***Allow Your Child To Return to the Activity***

Once your child has been quiet for two minutes in quiet time or time-out, let them rejoin the activity to practise playing cooperatively. Praise them for playing well. If fighting occurs again, take your child straight to quiet time or time-out. You may need to repeat quiet time or time-out several times before your child stops fighting.

### **Points To Remember**

Try not to give in to the younger child. Avoid asking the older child what they did to cause the problem as they will not be able to tell you exactly what happened. Treat each child equally to avoid rivalry between them. Be fair—it takes more than one to fight.

You may wonder if you should be rough with your child to show them how it feels, but this is not a good idea. It will only confuse your child if you do exactly what you have told them not to do.

Problems can arise when older or bigger children take over and do not let younger children have a turn. Do not wait for other parents to come to your child's rescue. Be prepared to step in and ensure that all children share.

#### **Key Steps**

- Explain the rules.
- Praise your child for playing with others.
- Help children solve problems.
- Use logical consequences if children do not share.
- Do not ignore children who are fighting, take action straight away.
- Tell your child what to do.
- If problems continue, use quiet time or time-out.
- Return your child to the activity to practise playing cooperatively.

***See the booklet 'Positive Parenting' for more information. If you have any questions or have tried these strategies and are concerned about your child's progress, contact the centre where you were given this tip sheet.***



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