

## Positive Parenting of Toddlers

# Hurting Others

**Toddlers sometimes hurt others without thinking. They may bite, scratch, pull hair, push or hit. Biting seems to cause the most concern to parents. Apart from hurting, a bite that breaks the skin can become infected. If not dealt with, this kind of behaviour can get worse. This tip sheet gives some suggestions to help you teach your toddler not to hurt others.**

You may wonder if you should bite or hit back to show your child how it feels. This may seem to work, but is not a good idea. Your child may stop hurting you but may continue to hurt others. It will only upset and confuse your child if you do exactly what you have told them not to do. Some parents get their child to say sorry. However *Sorry* on its own is often not enough to stop frequent hurting.

## Why Do Toddlers Hurt Others?

Biting is common when a toddler is teething. At this stage children appreciate teething rings, rusks and other safe soothing things to bite on.

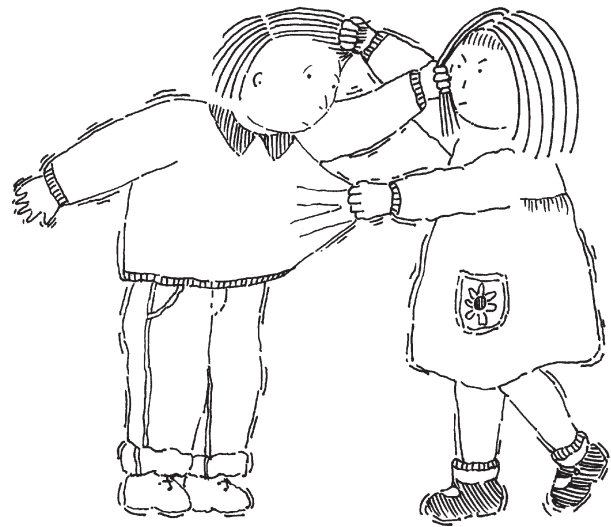
Other children bite, scratch, pull hair, push or hit just to see what happens. Hurting almost always gets a big reaction from the victim. This reaction may accidentally reward your child and the problem is likely to happen again.

Your child may hurt others out of frustration or anger. Toddlerhood can be a very frustrating time, with many things for children to get angry about—like not getting their own way or not knowing the words to tell others what they want. Hurting others may also be a way for your child to get what they want, such as making another child give up a toy. If it works, hurting is likely to continue.

## How To Help Prevent Your Child Hurting Others

### Watch Your Child Closely

Try to anticipate problems and prevent them if possible. In the beginning, watch your child very closely, especially when playing with other children and in



situations where hurting has happened before. You need to act quickly if your child is about to hurt someone.

## Encourage Your Child for Playing Well

Toddlers typically play side by side rather than cooperatively. When your child is playing well, give them lots of attention. Talk to your child about what they are doing—*You're building a tall tower with those blocks* or *That car is driving fast*. Praise your child by saying exactly what they are doing that pleases you—*You're playing nicely today, Tom* or *I like it when you two play so well together*.

For the first few days, you may like to give your child a special reward for playing well with others during a specific activity, such as play group or visiting friends. This reward may be an activity like a short story or game, or a treat such as a drink or small snack. Tell your child how pleased you are that they played well.

## Help Your Child Say What They Want

If your child is having difficulty saying what they want, give them some words they can use—*Sam, say: Matthew its my turn now*. Praise your child for nicely saying what they want.

## When Your Child Hurts Others

### Tell Your Child What To Do

Always act quickly when your child hurts someone. Speak firmly and tell your child what to do instead of hurting. Say something like—*Jane—don't hit Jack. Ask him for the toy*. Praise your child if they do as you ask.

## ***Practise Being Gentle***

The next step is to show your child how to be gentle, such as stroking hair instead of pulling it, or holding hands instead of pushing. Get your child to spend a few seconds practising how to be gentle. If your child refuses, simply guide them through the motions. Ignore protests. If hurting continues despite this, or another episode occurs within an hour, use the strategies outlined below.

## ***Tell Your Child the Problem and the Consequence***

If your child does not stop hurting others, say something like—*Erin, you are still hurting Lauren. Go to quiet time.*

## ***Take Your Child to Quiet Time or Time-Out Immediately***

Quiet time involves removing your attention from your child and having them sit quietly on the edge of the activity for a short time. To do this, sit your child on a chair away from others. Remind your child that they must be quiet in quiet time.

If your child protests or refuses to sit quietly, back up quiet time with time-out. Take your child to a safe but uninteresting room or space (or cot for younger toddlers under two years). Tell your child they must be quiet before they can come out of time-out. Give this reminder even though your child might be upset or angry. You may need to back up quiet time with time-out each time at first, until your child gets used to being quiet in quiet time.

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

Once your child has been quiet for two minutes in quiet time or time-out, it is important to let them rejoin the activity to practise playing without hurting others. If hurting happens again, take your child straight to quiet time. You may need to repeat quiet time or time-out several times before your child stops hurting others.

## **Key Steps**

- Try to anticipate and prevent problems.
- At first, praise and reward your child for playing nicely with others.
- Do not ignore your child if they are hurting others, take action straight away.
- Tell your child what you want them to do.
- If problems continue, use quiet time or time-out.
- Return your child to the activity to practise playing without hurting others.

***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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