

Babies and Aggression

Even very young babies can show aggressive behaviour, like howling and thrashing. But how should you react if your 11-month old hits another infant?

Some typical adult reactions to aggression include punishment, laughing at it, or just pretending it didn't happen. Some even think it is best just to "let the kids work it out" and not interfere at all.

Like anger, aggression is a normal part of a child's development and dealing with it is one of the most important challenges of parenthood. How your child displays her feelings and behaves with others can be influenced by her temperament. Differences in temperament will cause some children to be more aggressive while others are hardly aggressive at all.

When infants display anger and aggression, it is often due to discomfort, pain or frustration. Older babies will use aggression to protect themselves, to express anger or to get what they want. When your baby is aggressive, it is because he has not learned a better way of behaving.

Comfort, Play & Teach: A Positive Approach to Parenting®

Invest in Kids created Comfort, Play & Teach: A Positive Approach to Parenting to help parents address challenging behaviours like aggression. Comfort, Play & Teach are three simple ideas. When put into action they can have a big effect on your child's development.



Comfort your child

Comfort is the first thing that children need from parents. When you comfort your child, she learns to feel secure, loved and valued.



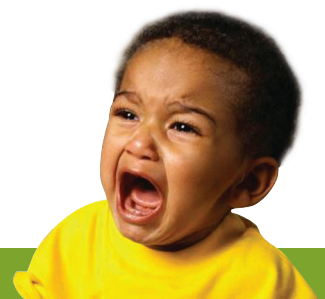
Play with your child

Play is the "work of children," and you are an essential "partner." When you play with your child, he learns to explore and discover the world and his role in it.



Teach your child

Teach is what parents do to help their children learn. When you teach your child, she learns how to relate to others, solve problems and communicate.



Comfort, Play & Teach Strategies for Baby

Using Comfort, Play & Teach strategies to prevent or to respond to aggressive behaviour will help your baby learn more appropriate ways of behaving with others.



Comfort

- **Your crying baby is telling you something and it is important for you to respond.** When you do, your baby will learn to trust you and other adults and know that you will respond consistently and sensitively when he is uncomfortable or upset.
- **Use a soothing voice and gentle touches.** Expressing warm feelings through touch is crucial for your baby's emotional development.
- **Try to understand what caused the aggressive behaviour and eliminate as many sources of frustration as possible.** This helps her feel safe and secure.



Play

- **Create safe play spaces so your baby can move through the house without constantly being told “don't touch” and “don't do that.”** Too many “no's” will frustrate and anger your baby.
- **Provide your baby with periods of play with you or other caregivers throughout the day.** Play is a wonderful way for your baby to learn about his environment and how to relate positively with the people and things that make up his world.
- **When playing with your baby, provide many examples of your own caring behaviour, and use simple words like “softly” and “gently” to describe your actions.**



Teach

- **Talk to your baby, congratulating him on every effort.** Even if he doesn't understand the words, he understands he is important to you and this makes him want to please you which is critical when he needs to follow your directions.
- **Support your baby's early efforts to soothe herself.** Thumb sucking or hugging a soft toy or blanket are rarely hard habits to break, and they help your baby learn to calm herself.
- **Provide your baby with consistent daily routines, which are the prelude to rules.** Taking the guesswork out of his day will help him develop a sense of what to expect and how to respond to your family's routines and activities.
- **Infants need to learn to cooperate and share.** If your baby is grabbing or hitting another child, let her know that it is not OK. Show her how to ask for toys how to offer toys to others or redirect her attention to another toy or activity.
- **Use simple words to let your baby know that her behaviour is too aggressive.** Remember, it will take lots of repetition before your baby understands what “no” means.



Positive Parenting Strategies to Cope with Aggression

- Stay calm.
- Treat any child who may have been hurt by the aggressor.
- Make sure no one is laughing or giving the child's inappropriate behaviour attention.
- Try to understand what caused the aggressive behaviour to explain it to each child involved.
- Tell the aggressor (even a baby) why the behaviour is inappropriate and what she can do instead.
- Be consistent with any consequences and follow through.

What a child will be
depends on you and me™



www.investinkids.ca



EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING KNOWLEDGE CENTRE

For more information on *Comfort, Play & Teach: A Positive Approach to Parenting and your child's development* visit www.investinkids.ca

Invest in Kids is a national charitable organization. Invest in Kids is a registered trademark of Invest in Kids Foundation. All Rights Reserved. Comfort, Play & Teach is a registered trademark of Invest in Kids Foundation. All Rights Reserved. © 2007 Invest in Kids Foundation.