

Hitting, Kicking, Biting and Hair Pulling

By Elizabeth Pantley, author of *The No-Cry Discipline Solution*

Children resort to aggressive behaviors because of a lack of wisdom and self-control. It is not a sign that a child is hateful or mean. Kids are human beings and human beings *will* get angry, we can't prevent that. What we can do is teach our children how to handle their frustration and anger in appropriate ways. If your child uses these physical acts to express her feelings, use some of the following tips to change her behavior.

Intercede before it happens

Watch your child during playtime. When you see her becoming frustrated or angry - intervene. Coach her through the issue. Teach her what to do, or model what to say to her friend. Or if she seems too upset to learn, redirect her attention to another activity until her emotions level out.

Teach and explain

It's one thing to tell a child what *not* to do or to step into an argument and solve it yourself. It's another thing entirely to teach her what *to do* in advance of the next problem. This can be done through role-play, discussion, and reading a few children's books about angry emotions.

Examine hidden causes

Is your child hungry, tired, sick, jealous, frustrated, bored or scared? If you can identify any feelings driving your child's actions you can address those along with the aggressive behavior.

Give more attention to the injured party.

Often the child who hits gets so much attention that the action becomes a way of gaining the spotlight. Instead, give more attention to the child who was hurt. After a brief statement, "*No hitting!*" turn and give attention to the child who was wronged, "*Come here and Mommy will give you a hug and read you a book.*"

Teach positive physical touches.

Show your child how to hold hands during a walk or how to give a back rub or foot massage. Teach a few physical games, like tag or cat's cradle. Under direct supervision, children who are more physical can gain a positive outlet for their physical energy.

Teach the clapping method

Tell a child to clap his hands whenever he feels an urge to hit. This gives him an immediate outlet for his emotions and helps him learn to keep his hands to himself. An alternate is to teach him to put his hands in his pockets when he feels like hitting. Reward with praise anytime you see he's successful.

Give your child a time out

To use Time Out when a child acts out aggressively, immediately and gently take the child by the shoulders, look him in the eye and say, “*No hurting others, time out.*” Guide the child to a chair and tell him, “*You may get up when you can play without hitting.*” By telling him that he can get up when *he’s* ready, you let him know that *he* is responsible for controlling his own behavior. If the child gets up and hits again, say, “*You are not ready to get up yet,*” and direct him back to time out.

Avoid play hitting and wrestling

Young children who roughhouse with a parent or sibling during play time might then use these same actions during non-wrestling times. It can be hard for them to draw the line between the two. If you have a child who has trouble controlling his physical acts then avoid this kind of play.

***Don’t* lose control**

When you see your child hurting another child it’s easy to get angry. This won’t teach your child what she needs to learn: how to control her emotions when others are making her mad. You are mad at her, so she’ll be watching how you handle your anger.

***Don’t* let your child watch violent TV**

Children can become immune to the impact of violence, and they may copy what they see depicted on television. Avoid viewing shows that portray aggression as an appropriate way of handling anger.

***Don’t* assume your child can figure it out**

If your child comes to you about a difficult situation, don’t send him away for tattling. But don’t step in and handle it for him, either. View his call for help as an invitation to teach him important social skills.

***Don’t* focus on punishment**

More than anything your child needs instructions on how to treat other human beings, particularly during moments of anger or frustration.

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Tantrums, Fussing and Whining

from *The No-Cry Discipline Solution* (McGraw-Hill 2007) by Elizabeth Pantley

If you ask parents to list the most frustrating discipline problems during early childhood, you would find that these three items appear on every list. All children

master their own version of these behaviors – every parent has to deal with them!

Controlling their emotions

Most often these behaviors are caused by a child's inability to express or control his emotions. Tiredness, hunger, boredom, frustration and other causes that ignite The Big Three can frequently be avoided or modified. When your child begins a meltdown, try to determine if you can tell what underlying issue is causing the problem. Solve that problem and you'll likely have your sweet child back again.

Handling tantrums, fussing and whining

No matter how diligent you are in recognizing trigger causes, your child will still have meltdown moments. Or even meltdown days. The following tips can help you handle those inevitable bumps in the road. Be flexible and practice those solutions that seem to bring the best results.

Offer choices

You may be able to avoid problems by giving your child more of a say in his life. You can do this by offering choices. Instead of saying, "*Get ready for bed right now,*" which may provoke a tantrum, offer a choice, "*What would you like to do first, put on your pajamas or brush your teeth?*" Children who are busy deciding things are often happy.

Get eye-to-eye

When you make a request from a distance your child will likely ignore you. Noncompliance creates stress, which leads to fussing and tantrums – from both of you. Instead, get down to your child's level, look him in the eye and make clear, concise requests. This will catch his full attention.

Tell him what you DO want

Instead of focusing on misbehavior and what you don't want him to do, explain exactly what you'd like your child to do or say instead. Give him simple instructions to follow.

Validate his feelings

Help your child identify and understand her emotions. Give words to her feelings, "You're sad. You want to stay here and play. I know." This doesn't mean you must give in to her request, but letting her know that you understand her problem may be enough to help her calm down.

Teach the Quiet Bunny

When children get worked up, their physiological symptoms keep them in an agitated state. You can teach your child how to relax and then use this approach when fussing begins.

You can start each morning or end each day with a brief relaxation session. Have your child sit or lie comfortably with eyes closed. Tell a story that he's a quiet bunny. Name body parts (feet, legs, tummy, etc.) and have your child wiggle it, and then relax it.

Once your child is familiar with this process you can call upon it at times when he is agitated. Crouch down to your child's level, put your hands on his shoulders, look him in the eye and say, let's do our Quiet Bunny. And then talk him through the process. Over time, just mentioning it and asking him to close his eyes will bring relaxation.

Distract and involve

Children can easily be distracted when a new activity is suggested. If your child is whining or fussing try viewing it as an "activity" that your child is engaged in. Since children aren't very good multi-taskers you might be able to end the unpleasant activity with the recommendation of something different to do.

Invoke his imagination

If a child is upset about something, it can help to vocalize his fantasy of what he wishes would happen: "I bet you wish we could buy every single toy in this store." This can become a fun game.

Use the preventive approach

Review desired behavior prior to leaving the house, or when entering a public building, or before you begin a playdate. This might prevent the whining or tantrum from even beginning. Put your comments in the positive (tell what you want, not what you don't want) and be specific.

When it's over, it's over

After an episode of misbehavior is finished you can let it go and move on. Don't feel you must teach a lesson by withholding your approval, love or company. Children bounce right back, and it is okay for you to bounce right back, too.

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Interrupting

from *The No-Cry Discipline Solution* (McGraw-Hill 2007) by Elizabeth Pantley

Whether you're on the phone, busy on your computer, or talking to another adult, it can be frustrating when your children constantly interrupt you. What's surprising to learn is that they do it because they always get a response from you when they do! They've learned that you are willing to stop what you're doing to answer them. Keep in mind that children are so focused on their own needs that

they don't realize that you have needs, too. They can learn how to pay more attention to other people's needs as well as their own, which will help control these endless interruptions.

Give lessons and examples

Teach your children how to determine if something warrants an interruption, as they may have a hard time deciphering when interruptions are justified. Discuss examples of when it's okay to interrupt, such as when someone is at the door, or if a sibling is hurt.

Coach proper manners

Teach your child how to wait for a pause in the conversation and to say, "Excuse me." When she remembers to do this, respond positively. If the interruption is about something that should wait, politely inform your child of this.

***Don't* answer the question.**

Many parents admonish kids for interrupting, but in the same breath respond to the child's interrupted request, which just reinforces the habit.

Watch your manners

Parents sometimes jump in so quickly to correct their child's bad manners that they don't realize that the way in which their correction is delivered is itself rude. Use your own good manners to model appropriate communication skills. Pause, look at your child, and say, "I'll be with you in a minute."

Teach "The Squeeze"

Tell your child that if she wants something when you are talking to another adult, she should gently squeeze your arm. You will then squeeze her hand to indicate that you know she is there and will be with her in a minute. At first, respond quickly so your child can see the success of this method. Over time you can wait longer, just give a gentle squeeze every few minutes to remind your child that you remember the request.

Create a busy-box

Put together a box of activities or games that can only be used when you are on the telephone, working at your desk, or talking with an adult. Occasionally refill it with new things or rotate the contents. Be firm about putting them away when you are done. Your child will be look forward to your next conversation, which will be interruption free!

Plan ahead

Before you make a phone call or have a visitor, let your child know what to expect. *"I'm going to make a phone call. I'll be a while, so let's get your busy box ready to use while I'm on the phone."*

Give praise when deserved

Catching your child doing the right thing can be the best lesson of all. Praise your child for using good manners, for remembering to say “excuse me,” and for interrupting only for a valid reason.

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What Triggers Your Anger?

By Elizabeth Pantley, author of *The No-Cry Discipline Solution*

Family life is complicated and unpredictable. Day-to-day expectations and responsibilities can create angry emotions in both parents and children. No matter how skilled you are at parenting, no matter how wonderful your children are, you cannot eliminate or avoid the unpleasant situations that occur in all families. However, once you understand where the anger comes from you can modify the situation and learn ways to control your reactions, so that anger can occupy a smaller place in your home.

Our children bring us incredible joy. Yet, there are times that they can bring out the anger in us. It is helpful to identify the things that provoke your anger so you can make positive changes in your household.

What sets you off?

Most parents get angry over issues that are insignificant in the grand scheme of life, yet happen on such a regular basis that they become blown out of proportion. Some of the most common parenting issues that trigger anger are whining, temper tantrums, sibling bickering, and non-cooperation. Determine which behaviors most bother you and set about making a plan to correct each problem that sets off your anger.

Notice your hot spots

In addition to triggers, there are “hot spots” in the day when anger more easily rises to the surface. These are typically times when family members are tired, hungry or stressed. These emotions leave us more vulnerable to anger. This can happen in the early morning, before naptime, before meals, or at bedtime. You may also encounter situations when misbehavior increases, and so does your anger: grocery shopping, playdates, or family visits, for example.

Set a plan

Determine if there are things you can do differently to ward off some of the issues that spark your anger. For example, if the morning rush brings stress, you can prepare things the night before: set out clothing, pack lunches, collect shoes. Then create a “morning poster” that outlines the daily routine step-by-step.

If you find that tempers are shorter in the hour before dinner, set out healthy appetizers, enlist the kids' help in preparing dinner, get the kids involved in a craft activity, or plan an earlier meal time.

Doing things the way you've always done them and expecting different results only leaves you frustrated and angry. Instead, identify your anger triggers and take action to change things for the better.

Learn something new

Once you've identified a problem, consider several options for solving it. Jot down possible alternatives on paper, or talk it over with another adult. Read through a few parenting books and check the indexes for your topic. Visit an online parenting chat group or posting board. There's no reason for you to make decisions in a vacuum – I guarantee that the problems you are dealing with are common and there are lots of sources for solutions.

Be flexible

Anger is not something that can be dealt with once and then will go away. Your children grow and change, and new issues appear. From time to time take a fresh look at the issues that create negative emotions in your family and take action to change things for the better.

Let love help

And, finally, at times of anger, hold on to the feeling of love that is the foundation of your relationship with your child. Take time every day to bask in the joy of being a parent. Take time to play, talk and listen. Hug, kiss and cuddle your child often. When you build up this foundation of positive love and emotions you will find yourself less likely to experience intense anger.

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