

Taming the Terrible Twos, Threes and Fours



Toddlers are trying to figure out their place in the world. They have little or no impulse control. Their language skills are immature. They cannot express feelings in words. Toddlers have not learned empathy. They do not understand that actions can hurt others.

As children play with other children, their aggressive behavior usually lessens. Children learn that bad behavior gets them in trouble. By age 7, aggressive behavior should taper off.

Children do not just grow out of aggressive behavior. As soon as a child displays aggression, parents must work daily to help their child stay in control.

Behavior – good and bad – is learned. Model good behavior, and show your child how to be good. A parent must teach so a child can learn from his mistakes.

Every parent knows about the “terrible twos.” While not pleasant, aggressive behavior in 2 and 3-year-olds is normal. If not dealt with, however, this anti-social behavior could continue into adulthood. Now is the time to teach your child the difference between good and bad behavior.

1. Limit your toddler’s TV time. It teaches bad behavior. Children copy what they see.
2. Control your temper. Stay calm even when your child is acting out.
3. Respond right away when your child is aggressive. Remove her from the situation. Tell her what she did wrong. Keep your language simple. For example, “You cannot hit Tommy. It hurts him.”
4. Be consistent with discipline. No hitting means no hitting – ever. You must discipline even when you are busy and tired.
5. Teach with logical consequences. If your child is throwing a toy at someone, take the toy away. Explain that he can play with the toy when he does not use it for hitting.
6. Do not spank. It does not teach your child how to act the next time.
7. Praise good behavior. Give children more attention for being **good** than for being bad.
8. Help your child learn empathy. Talk about hurting others. When your child hurts someone, give more attention to the person who was hurt.
9. Teach your child to express her feelings with words.
10. Encourage outdoor play. Your child can run off his extra energy.
11. Consult a doctor if your child’s aggressive behavior continues. He will help you identify and deal with specific problems.

Call the Parent Help Line. We listen. We can find you help.
1-217-544-5808 or 1-888-727-5889 from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m., 7 days a week
or log onto www.parenthelpline.org