



Hunsbury Park Primary School

A Parent's Guide
To
Challenging Behaviour

How to deal with difficult or aggressive behaviour from your child

All children have moments when they lash out in anger by swearing, shouting, throwing or kicking objects. There are times when the aggression they show can seem particularly frightening and out of control, whether it's to parents, other family members or outside the home.

Watch our video for tips and advice on dealing with difficult behaviour from your child

How does it make the parent feel?

Parents often feel helpless and in despair about their *children's behaviour* and unsure on the best approach to tackle this. It is not uncommon for parents to feel responsible for their child's behaviour. We often hear the term I love my child but don't like them at the moment when parents are in this situation and it is the behaviour they dislike not their child.

Some parents are ashamed to admit that they can't control their children's aggression and are reluctant to talk about it, especially if the aggression is directed at the parents. If you are facing a similar issue in your home, it may feel like you constantly have to walk on egg shells, not knowing what could trigger another outburst. You may be feeling isolated and unable to share this with anyone as you may fear being judged for your child's behaviour.

It is important to seek support and advice as soon as you can so help can be put in place for your child and the rest of the family. Our family support workers can offer you advice and support if you are struggling with this issue or something similar.

What causes a child to act aggressive?

It is not always obvious what the driving force is behind your child's aggressive behaviour for a parent. Your child may be feeling frustrated about something that is happening in their life, they may be getting bullied or having troubles at school, they may be seeking attention or it could be they are experiencing hormonal mood swings. Whatever the cause of their behaviour it may be quite clear to you they are struggling to manage their anger and emotions. This can cause a parent to feel at a loss on what to do for the best. If you are feeling this, please do not lose confidence in your parenting, as it is natural to feel this way under the circumstances.

Managing aggression in your children

It is important to try and set some time aside to find out if they are struggling with this, it might not be easy for them to open up straight away and you may have to keep approaching them gently until they can open up. You might want to leave a book for them to write their feelings in if they do find it hard to talk. If they are not much of a writer, maybe give them a memory stick and they can store their thoughts digitally. Let them know that you love them very much and are there for them but need them to meet you halfway. You can ask them questions that will help them to explore their anger, like how it makes them feel when they hit that point, how it makes them feel after, etc.

Feeling angry and upset at times is natural and acceptable and most people do at some point or another, so let your child know this. Try to acknowledge their feelings, but set limits: "I know you feel angry, but I don't want to see any hitting; biting; shouting or swearing."

Keep a diary so you can write down the incidents as there may be a pattern and note down the triggers. Are there particular events that set your child off? If you start to see when, you can sometimes work out why.

If children see problems solved with raised voices or fists, they learn to follow suit. If you want to stop a child being violent, you may first have to address what is happening around them, it may be difficult to explore this but if there is conflict in your family life or perhaps communication is often through shouting, they may have learned this behaviour.

Learn how to defuse an angry situation. Lower your voice instead of shouting and look them in the eye. Talk with and listen to your child when they're calm. Look at why they might be feeling bad before looking at what they may do to control their behaviour.

You can't wave a magic wand and vanish away a child's unhappy feelings. What you can do is help them learn how to manage what they do about them. So encourage them to say, "I feel angry/left out/put down", instead of hitting out.

It isn't easy loving or showing affection for a child who is being hurtful. But they need to be shown that they are acceptable. Separate who they are from what they do by saying, "I love you and always will, but I don't love what you're doing." Be positive and praise them when they do well. Blaming, shaming, or punishing children can make them feel worse about themselves and so even more aggressive.

Further Support

Familylives.org offer an online chat facility an email advice line as well as a telephone consultation line. 0808 800 2222

Further help can be offered by the family support lead at Hunsbury Park.