

**Cherubs Preschool**  
**Information Sheet – Aggressive Behaviour**

## **Aggressive Behaviour: Why it happens and what to do about it**



### **Why do 2-year-olds sometimes get aggressive**

There you are, watching your little angel at the park, thinking how blessed you are to have them. All of a sudden, they draw back their dimpled little hand — and whacks another child squarely on the nose.

Shocking as it may seem to you (and to the other parents in the playground), aggression is a normal part of your child's development. Primitive language skills, a fierce desire to become independent, and impulsiveness make children this age prime candidates for getting physical. Some degree of hitting and biting is completely normal, because 2-year-olds are so focused on 'me' and 'mine'.

So while your 2-year-old's behaviour may embarrass and worry you — and it's certainly not okay for them to hurt other children — it doesn't mean you're raising a bully. By consistently letting your youngster know that aggressive behaviour is not acceptable and showing them other ways to express their feelings, you can help them control themselves and learn to get along with others.

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### What you can do about aggression

**Respond quickly.** Try to respond immediately when you see your child getting aggressive. It's tempting to wait until they have hit their brother for the third time before saying, "That's enough!" (especially when you've already reprimanded them a dozen times in the last hour). Even so, it's best to let your child know instantly when they have done something wrong.

**Remove.** Remove them from the situation for a brief time-out — for a 2-year-old, even a few seconds may be enough. The idea is for the child to connect their behaviour with the consequence and figure out that if they hit or bite, they will miss out on the fun.

**Follow up.** If your 2-year-old gets into the ball pit at the indoor play centre and immediately starts throwing balls at other children, take them out. Sit down with them and watch the other children play, explaining that they he can go back in when they are ready to join the fun without hurting others.

No matter how angry you are with your child, try not to yell, or tell your child they are naughty. Rather than getting the child to change their behaviour, this simply teaches children that verbal and physical aggression are the way to go when they are very upset. Instead, showing your child that you can control *your* temper may be the first step in helping *them* control theirs.

**Stick to the plan.** As much as possible, respond to aggressive acts the same way every time. The more predictable you are e.g. "Okay, you bit Billy again — that means another time-out", the sooner you'll set up a pattern that your child comes to recognise and expect.

Even if he does something to mortify you in public, stick to the game plan. Most parents understand your situation — after all we've all been there before. If people stare, try not to worry and handle the episode the way you see fit.

**Show and tell.** After you've pulled your child aside, wait until they settle down a bit and then calmly and gently review what happened. Ask them if they can explain what triggered their outburst e.g. "Jordan, why do you think you got so mad at Scott?" Explain that it's perfectly natural to get angry sometimes, but it's not okay to hit, kick, or bite. Encourage your 2-year-old to find a better way to express how mad they are. Kicking a ball, asking a grown-up for help, or

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even just telling his friend that they upset are good, age-appropriate responses to anger.

**Reward good behaviour.** Rather than paying attention to your 2-year-old only when they misbehave, try to catch them being good — if they asks for a turn on the swing instead of pushing another child out of the way, for instance, or shares a toy instead of snatching it away. Praise them lavishly e.g. "I was so proud when you waited your turn. Well done!" and they will soon realise how powerful politeness can be. You could even reward them with a sticker when they manage to keep their temper in check.

**Limit TV time.** Innocent-looking cartoons and other so-called children's programmes can sometimes send out wrong messages. Try to monitor the programmes your 2-year-old sees by watching them with your child — particularly if they can be prone to aggression.

If something happens on a show that you don't approve of, talk to your child about it: "Did you see how that bear pushed the other bear to get what he wanted? That wasn't a very good thing to do, was it?" You might also find that your child is aggressive when they do not get enough opportunities to burn off their abundant energy. So try to provide plenty of unstructured play time — preferably outdoors — to let them blow off steam.

**Don't be afraid to seek help.** Sometimes a child's aggression requires more intervention than a parent can provide. If your 2-year-old seems to behave aggressively more often than not or if your efforts to curb their behaviour aren't working, talk to your health visitor.

Together you can root out the source of the behaviour and help your child through it. Remember, your child is still very young. With careful guidance and plenty of patience, it will soon be a thing of the past.