It Takes a Village
A Newsletter for Parents and Caregivers Raising Tiny Humans

Kicking, Biting & Hitting
Why Infants & Toddlers Engage in These Behaviors

Before we even explore the why’s of kicking, biting and hitting, know that you are a great caregiver & you did nothing wrong! These behaviors, although not ideal and often challenging, are also developmentally appropriate.

Kicking, biting and hitting does not mean your child is bad or aggressive and again, these behaviors are not a reflection of your parenting or caregiving style.

There may be many reasons a child kicks, bites or hits, however often it can be broken down into 3 main reasons.

The Child's Expressive Language is Still Emerging

The Child Wants to Interact with Friends

Infants & Toddlers Lack Impulse Control

Let’s explore this a little more and identify ways to help infants and toddlers who may bite, kick or hit.

Expressive Language is Still Emerging
Even if you have a toddler with a lot of expressive language, they might find it harder to use when they are over-stimulated and emotions are high. This is when infants and toddlers will use their body to express how they feel.

They Want to Interact
When infants and toddlers hit, they often get interesting reactions. So they may experiment to see if they get the same response again. They do not know how their actions affect others. It will be years before they can imagine another person's experience.

They Lack Impulse Control
Infants and toddlers have just started to develop the area of the brain that helps them make decisions and manage emotions (their prefrontal cortex).

BUT WHAT CAN WE DO???

There are things we can do to help our infants and toddlers when they are having big emotions that are leading to behaviors like kicking, biting & hitting.

Flip over for some tips, ideas & strategies that can help you during these challenging moments & know that you are not the only parent or caregiver who has had to deal with these things!
Validate Your Child’s Feelings

Be firm and clear in your response to your child, while also validating their feelings. For example, in a calm voice say “I can see that you are really angry. Taking turns is hard, but hitting hurts.”

Model Empathy

By showing concern for the other person involved, you are modeling empathy. For example, “Hitting made your friend feel sad. They are crying. Let’s see if there is something we can do to help them feel better”

There will be times your child is not ready to check on their friend or say sorry, but as the adult you can let them know that you are going to check on their friend and try to help them.

Create a Boundary

There are times you may have to calmly remove your child from the scene—depending on how big the behavior is. You may have to also become that boundary by calmly sitting next to your child and offering them a safe space to melt-down. Again, validate their feelings, and remind them that you are here to help.

Kids cannot problem solve when they are having big emotions. Lend them your calm, and then help them.

Try to Stay Calm

This is the most important part—often the hardest part. When children are in the middle of a big behavior or melt down— they cannot problem solve. They need a calm trusting adult to help them stay safe and seen.

Remember this moment is temporary and is not a reflection of you as the caregiver.

Breathe and think... “It’s my job to stay calm for them, not their job to get calm for me.”

Also give yourself a little grace. We are all human and “flip our lids” from time to time. This all takes practice and will never always be perfect. But as long as you try to stay calm and be there... it will always be good enough.

Questions, Concerns, Want to Chat?

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