



# Managing Your Child's Violent Streak

Is your child showing signs of aggression and violence? Find out how you can handle a little slugger. ■ WORDS ANNA FERNANDEZ

**E**xplosive and violent physical and verbal behaviours do not necessarily mean that your child is innately bad or cruel. It often speaks to an inability to cope with intense feelings, communicate needs and wants, or navigate through certain social situations.

Because of this, children may turn their energy and frustrations toward violent behaviour like kicking, biting, or hitting. Whichever form their aggression takes, it can be a normal part of child development.

However, it's up to you to help them develop the right tools for self-discipline, proper judgment, as well as the ability to express their feelings in appropriate ways. Here are some strategies you can employ to do just that.

## Enforce Immediate and Natural Consequences

Any act of violence should result in an immediate consequence. Don't give warnings or reminders hoping that they'll eventually lead to your child stopping such behaviours completely. Set clear limits to behaviour and adhere to transparent and well-explained consequences. Be sure your child knows exactly what's expected of them by thoroughly explaining the rules.

Carolyn Kee, principal consultant psychologist at Adelphi Families & Youth Centre, advises parents to implement natural consequences, a particular set of actions which logically follow inappropriate behaviour. For example, a child should apologise if they hurt someone, do something nice

for the person they hurt, and clean up any messes made.

You can also establish timeouts, which when used appropriately, teach children how to calm down. The ultimate goal of a timeout should be for children to use it to evaluate what they're about to do before they lash out aggressively. Loss of privileges like preventing them from engaging in their favourite activity or confiscating their electronics can also be an effective reminder for them to not hurt anyone else.

## Communication is Key

You know your child best. If you think she was right on the edge of becoming physical, it's time to address the matter. Talk to her during a moment of calm and explain that you're concerned about the consequences of violent

behaviour in the real world. When you do this, you're teaching your child what actually happens in real life, what your boundaries are, and what the repercussions for her behaviour will be.

This can be difficult to achieve if your child isn't much of a talker, to begin with. According to Dr Vanessa von Auer, clinical psychologist at VA Psychology Center and principal at Integrated International School, parents should not force their children to talk out their emotions. Instead, they can normalise the big feelings that the child exhibited and emphasise to the child that communicating openly about them is necessary by reassuring them that such emotions are completely valid. She says, "When the child is ready to talk it out, parents need to regulate their own feelings and responses and should not be judgmental, lecturing, or threatening."

Focus on your child's strengths – anything they may be good at or enjoy. Ask them if they have any ideas on how they can best manage their own anger or if they would like to get suggestions from friends. This gets her thinking, rather than reacting. Remember, you're helping her get acquainted with her own emotions and find ways to deal with them non-violently.

**When you decide on a method, encourage her to use it the next time you're in a conflict with her. Although a lot of trial and error may be involved, a power struggle often triggers physical aggression, and if you manage to de-escalate the situation before she starts getting physical, it's well worth it.**

Communication is a two-way street. You can't be expecting your child to talk to you willingly if you're not doing so yourself. Kee emphasises, "Make it a daily practice to talk about your own feelings, thoughts, physiological responses, non-verbal expressions, and actions in response to situations. Share some of your own emotions that may be considered socially undesirable, like envy or resentment, so that your child recognises that it is normal to have such feelings and that she can talk about them to you without being afraid of being judged."

### Never Resort to Punishment

No matter what type of consequence you choose to use, make sure that it constitutes discipline and not punishment. This is because a child who is physically punished may begin to think this is the correct way to treat people when their behaviour is inappropriate.

According to Kee, by resorting to punishment, the parent is modelling aggressive behaviour and conveying the message that problems are solved using fear and aggressive means. The child does not learn other ways to solve problems, like talking it out, negotiating, understanding her internal motivations, and finding other ways to achieve them. She may then re-enact this method of solving problems with her peers.

Research documents that physical punishment may result in childhood delinquency, anti-social behaviour, and reinforces a child's aggressiveness toward others. It also affects the quality of the parent-child relationship as well as future adult relations, the child's sense of safety and ability to trust others, their mental health, and their capacity to internalise socially acceptable behaviour in the long run. Dr von

# How to not raise a spoiled child



READ ABOUT IT HERE!

Auer says, "Physical punishment such as spanking and verbal punishment (like threatening, belittling, yelling, and criticising) is harmful to a child's emotional development, hurts physically, and can severely impact their self-esteem and sense of self-worth as they mature."

Usually, if a child is consistently faced with negative consequences for violent behaviour and learns new ways of coping with frustration, bouts of aggression will begin to subside. Unfortunately, there is no one-size-fits-all solution and some kids do exhibit violent or disruptive behaviours that stem from serious behavioural disorders or mental health problems.

In some circumstances, children may require professional help to address these deep-seated issues. If such behaviours begin putting a strain on your child's and others' social and familial relationships, you should look into seeking more aggressive intervention methods and professional assistance. [m](#)