

What to Do About Hitting

This answer comes from Sharon Bâby

- Q.** We have two daughters, three and one years old. I just went back to work. Our previous caregiver retired, so we brought someone in to the house to look after them. The problem is hitting. When the three-year-old does not want to do something, she hits her mom, her dad, or the caregiver. What should I do? Does the SAS have any books on this? Is this normal?
- A.** Your child is likely very normal. She is possibly feeling distressed/frustrated/worried about all of the changes in her life: mom back at work, an active baby sister who may be taking her toys and her adult attention, no houseful of playmates, new sitter with new expectations, and different looks, smells, touches, and even food.

Whatever positive parenting you choose for your children, it is critical that your sitter follows similar practices, and that she or he is not using hitting as a way of discipline. Spending time with your children while the sitter is responsible for them will help you judge whether or not the sitter is a healthy, positive role model and teacher for your children. Listen to your instincts and never settle for second best when it comes to the people caring for your children.

When your child hits, it is a good time for you to listen. Encourage her to tell you about her troubles. “It looks as if you are having a bad day; can you tell me what is wrong?” Listen well, then name the feelings that might be at the root of the problem. For example: “It sounds as if you are lonely and angry.” Tell you daughter that it is okay to be angry, but it is not okay to hurt herself or anyone else.

At three years of age your child is just learning to express her emotions. You can help her to do that in healthy ways and encourage her as she learns new strategies that she can use to control herself. First and foremost is modeling healthy management of your own emotions.

You can show her that when you get angry, you need to take time to calm down (tame the tiger).

Some **Time to Tame the Tiger Possibilities** are:

- Mom counts to ten; the child jumps up and down ten times.
- Mom takes three deep breaths; the child trumpets like an elephant three times.
- Mom makes some tea; the child walks around the living room like tiger.
- Mom does the dishes; the child plays with bubbles and unbreakable dishes in the sink.
- Mom and child play parachute with a sheet.
- Mom and child cuddle.
- Mom and child read a book together.
- Mom sits alone wrapped in a blanket; the child sits alone wrapped in a blanket.

It is important that your child knows that when she is feeling calmer (she has tamed the tiger); she can then decide to resume her play. This is positive time to calm down, not a negative time out.

As your child grows, she will also learn to apologize and make amends by watching and following your example.

Three great books that may be helpful:

- *How to Talk so Kids Will Listen & Listen so Kids Will Talk* by Faber and Mazlish
- *Positive Discipline for Preschoolers* by Nelsen, Erwin, and Duffy
- *Time Out: Abuses and Effective Uses* by Nelsen and Glenn

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