

When Your Child Hits, Kicks, or Bites

Being hit, kicked, or bitten by your own child is jarring, even when you understand where it's coming from. It doesn't mean you're doing something wrong, and it doesn't mean your child is "a hitter." It usually means they've hit a wall they don't yet have words or strategies for.

"The goal isn't a child who never feels angry. It's a child who has another way to show it."

IN THE MOMENT: WHAT TO DO

- 1 **Protect first, calmly.** Block the hit, move the target, or create distance, without gripping hard, yelling, or retaliating.
- 2 **Keep your voice flat and low.** "I won't let you hit me" said calmly lands better than the same words shouted.
- 3 **Name the feeling once safety is handled.** "You're really angry right now."
- 4 **Remove the audience if it's partly for attention.** Step back slightly rather than delivering a long reaction.
- 5 **Follow through on the same boundary every time.** Even when you're tired of repeating it, consistency is what makes it click.

RIGHT AFTER

- ☐ Check on anyone who was hit, calmly and without a big show of alarm.
- ☐ Once everyone's calm, help your child do a repair, a check-in, a gesture, whatever's age-appropriate. Skip forced apologies that aren't genuine.
- ☐ Note what happened right before the hit. Task demand? Told no? A sibling took something? This is where the real pattern lives.
- ☐ Praise any moment they used words or walked away instead of hitting, even in an unrelated situation.

TRY THIS

"Hands are not for hitting. Show me angry with your words or your feet stomping instead." Model the replacement in the moment, not just after.

TEACHING A REPLACEMENT, AHEAD OF TIME

Practice the words or signal for "I'm angry" during calm moments, not just after an incident, it's a skill that needs rehearsal.

Give an acceptable physical outlet (stomping, squeezing something, pushing against a wall) they can turn to before it turns into hitting.

Watch for the early warning signs specific to your child, clenched fists, going quiet, faster breathing, and step in with support before it escalates.

If hitting is frequent, intense, or not responding to consistent strategies, a BCBA or your child's therapist can help identify the specific function behind it.