Strategies to Help Your Older Child Handle Aggression Toward You

As parents, we need to show self-control and use gentle words if we want our kids to do the same. It's easy to respond with yelling or anger, but remember, your child is looking to you for cues on how to control her impulses and have good behavior. While it can be terribly embarrassing to have a child that continues to act out, keep in mind that their negative behavior is most likely happening because they are still navigating their way through their intense emotions. This can be very difficult for some kids, so try not to over-react or personalize it.

What should you do when your child hurts you? In that moment nothing! Any action you take with your child from that state will have results that aren't good for either of you. You will almost certainly perpetuate a cycle that includes physical violence. That doesn't mean you don't set clear limits. You actually have a lot of power to prevent this situation from recurring. It's just that you need to regulate your own emotions before you can help your child regulate hers.

Children learn to regulate their strong emotions when we:

1. Accept all feelings.

2. Set firm, clear limits on actions.

3. Regulate our own emotions.

Older children who are aggressive with you, those between 3 and 7 years old are many times experimenting. They want to see what you will do when they act out. It's your job to provide the consequences for the "effect" to work.

1. Since older children are more verbal, you can use a variety of phrases when they misbehave. Examples include, "Biting is not OK," or "Hitting hurts others. You need to stop."
2. You can practice ways to de-fuse your child's anger during calmer moments. You can say, "Sometimes I get angry too. When that happens, I say 'I'm angry' and I leave the room."
3. You can also teach your child how to count to ten until he is less angry, how to do deep breathing in order to calm down, or how to use her words by making statements such as "I am really, really angry right now!" All of these methods help take the immediate focus off of your child's anger and teach them to recognize this important emotion.
4. If your child hits you frequently, it may be helpful to address the problem with a reward system. Reward your child for "using gentle touches." Break the day up into several time periods where he can earn stickers or something

small for good behaviors.

5. Your child needs a clear consequence each time she hits you. Look for consequences that will deter her from hitting again.
6. Taking privileges away can be an effective discipline strategy. Restrict your child's access to electronics or certain toys or activities for 24 hours. After you take the privilege away make sure you do it in a firm yet loving manner, "I know you are angry but you cannot hit me. Since I told you that we are not accepting this from you, you will not be able to _____". "I know you can be angry without hitting, you will try again tomorrow."
7. Before you enter into a potentially difficult social situation, review the consequences with your child about what will happen if she cannot control her anger. Tell your child, "I feel you can handle your anger, but if you can't, we will have to leave the park and not come back until next week. Do you understand?" **Make certain that you follow through with whatever consequences you pose to your child.**
8. Another technique that works very well for some children is to change the tone and volume of your voice. You can help your child stay calm by immediately lowering your voice and say quietly, "I need you to calm down now. I am going to walk away and calm down as well and when I am done I want you to be done screaming."

9. Praise your child often when he uses gentle touches. When he hugs you, make a point to tell him how much you enjoy nice touches like hugs. If he responds appropriately when you tell him no, praise his efforts.

The key is developing a clear, uncomplicated, consistent plan and following it in a composed manner. Remember: the best example of appropriate behavior is you, and your young child is watching.

Information taken and adapted from: Aha Parenting www.ahaparenting.com