

ROLLING WITH THE punches!

Separating the behaviour from the child is the key to managing aggressive toddlers, says **Paul Dix...**



Some children bite. Some push, shove, punch and more. Even with the keenest vigilance and the deftest diversionary

techniques it's not possible to predict or preempt every incident, but there are simple things you can do to protect the children, yourself and the parents (from each other!)

Some children who get dramatic responses to aggressive behaviour thrive on the immediacy and volume of attention. Your immediate response must be planned and consistent. Quick, calm, assertive intervention

works well. Disentangle the children, but remember physical action must be driven by the right intention and use the minimum possible force. Send, lead or guide the protagonist away from the group. Make sure your

"No" has impact but not anger. Leave the child alone to stew/cry/write to their MP etc.

Turn your attention back to the child who has been attacked. Only return to the angry child as the emotion subsides. You may have to accelerate this, "I'll speak to you when you stop crying/screaming/chewing the stairs" etc. Now repeat the rule, "Hands down" or "No biting" three times, with eye contact and all the assertive energy you can muster. Now ask: "Why have I sat you here?" "Which rule did you break?" "What do you need to do now?" Use the same script every

time. Make your response utterly predictable and safe, yet effective.

Before you decide if the apology will be immediate or delayed until the dust has settled, write down what happened without emotion or judgment. Do it as soon as you possibly can after the incident. Make sure that you routinely record, report and if necessary refer aggressive behaviours that result in physical injury. Now reinforce the good behaviour of children who helped, children who stayed calm and reassure those who were worried by it.

Later, when you speak to the parents of an aggressor use the same unemotional, non-judgemental tone that you used in your report. Seek a practical agreement from parents resisting the temptation to search for reason. Explain your consistent routine response to aggressive behaviour and see if this could be replicated at home. Is there a shared language that you can use? Is there a ritual that you could both agree to? Repetition and consistency works.

A few bitey children grow up into bitey adults, but most grow out of aggressive behaviour in weeks or months. Skilled adults separate the behaviour from the child and deal with it. They discourage labels from developing knowing that with persistence and determination the behaviour will change.

findoutmore

Paul Dix is Managing Director of Pivotal Education, a team of award-winning behaviour trainers. For more about his live and online training, or to join over 15,000 teachers in benefiting from Pivotal's acclaimed 'Free Tips on Behaviour Management', head to www.pivotaleducation.com

reporting back

With the parents of a victim don't make the mistake of making light of the situation. It may be only a scratch, but a scratch to one parent is GBH to another...

- Explain in detail exactly what happened, what you did and what you intend to do in the future.
- Take time to reveal the steps you'll take to keep their child safe.
- Reassure them with your detailed record keeping, clear plan and rational thinking.
- Avoid being drawn into any judgment on the other child, parent or on their parenting skills. It will only come back to haunt you.