ULTIMATE GUIDE

Overcome

GENTLY &

Toddler

PEACEFULLY

Aggression

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Connecting Parent & Child

About Sharon

Your Parenting Connection Coach



Sharon is best described as a voracious reader who's constantly devouring books & articles on parenting, and is a work-from-home Mum to a toddler.

She founded 'Connecting Parent & Child' with the vision of empowering parents overcome common parenting struggles and build a deep & lasting bond with their children, the way it's meant to be!

She is known for her empathy that allows her to elaborately & quickly diagnose problems faced by parents, understand the root cause and offer practical and long-term strategies for correction and connection, based on the principles of Gentle & Respectful Parenting.

Connecting Parent & Child

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The Ultimate Guide

How To

Overcome Toddler Aggression

Gently & Peacefully



The toddler years (13 – 36 months) can be extremely stressful for parents. We often find ourselves wondering how our child can go from being a cheerful little bub to a kid who hits and kicks, attracting embarrassing eyeballs, in a matter of seconds. However, most parents often fail to understand that the toddler years are equally stressful for the child.

Here's a SECRET every toddler mom & dad must know - **"They're not giving us a hard time, they're having a hard time."**

When we look at our toddler with a heart of empathy, rather than seeing him as a little monster trying to *manipulate* us – we become capable of handling our toddler's challenging behaviors in ways that are creative, peaceful and above all, respectful towards both the parent & the child. And I'm here to help you with that.

I'm Sharon - Mom to a 3 year old, who's successfully thrived through the toddler years! And the credit for that goes to the authors of parenting books, blogs, and the Facebook groups out there providing so much valuable information on Gentle & Respectful Parenting.

I believe "Every Child Deserves A Great Parent". So, the purpose behind everything I create is to empower each parent to go from good to great, *knowing & implementing better ways of parenting that are based in unconditional love, not fear.*

You're reading this because you're shocked by your toddler's aggressive behavior in one or more of the following ways –

- hits one or both parents, or the nanny, or the grandparents, or others.
- hits himself, hits his head with hands, or bangs his head against the wall or floor
- hits other children "for no reason".

- biting
- pulling hair
- throwing things
- kicking
- pushing

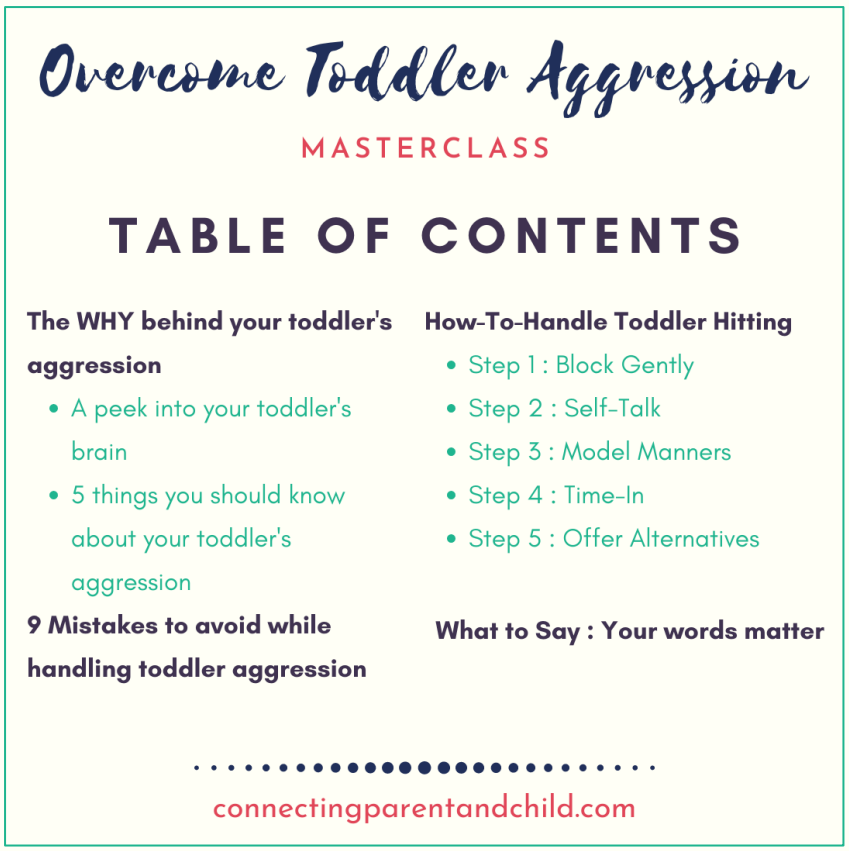
Let me assure you, you've got your hands on one of the most comprehensive resources that you will find on this topic! You can bid Google good-bye, and get ready to 'Overcome your Toddler's Aggression – Gently & Peacefully!'

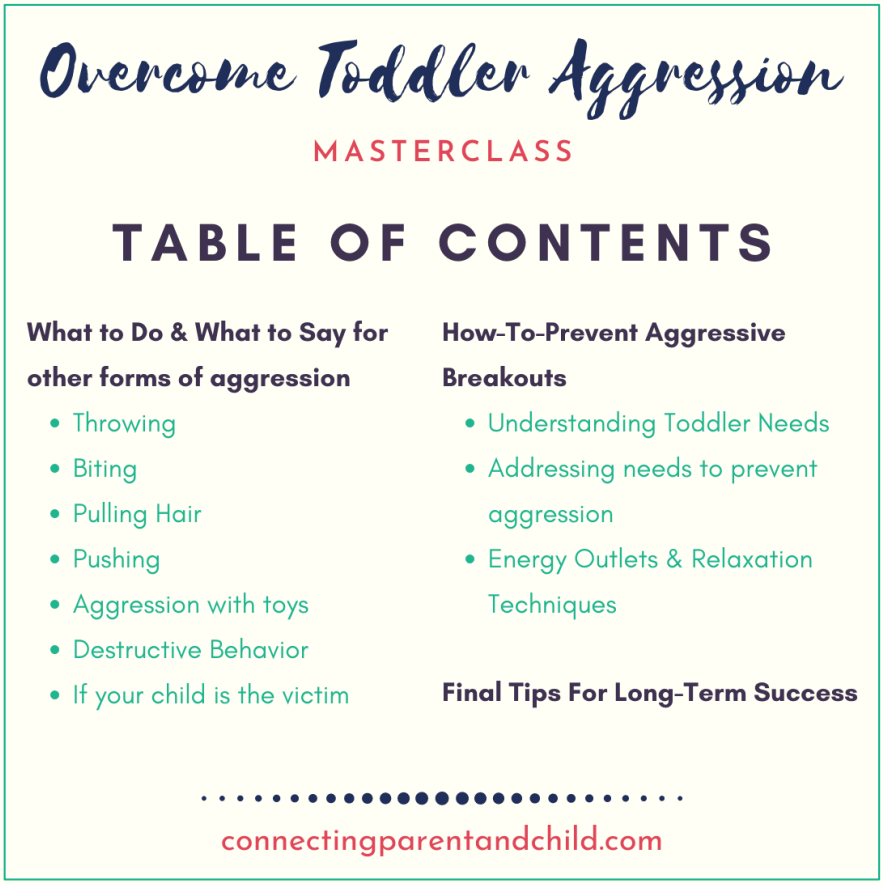
After reading through this Comprehensive Action Plan, you will be able to:

- Tackle aggression in your toddler as and when it arises, gently and peacefully.
- You will know exactly WHAT-TO-DO and WHAT-TO-SAY, each time your toddler decides to behave like Hulk!
- You will have a simple 3-step solution that you must follow & repeat on loop, till your toddler gets it!
- You will be able to observe for warning signs (Yes, there are!) and prevent aggressive behavior even before it happens.
- And as you do all of this – you will imbibe key life skills like emotion management in your toddler, over time through your consistent and gentle responses.

Consider this guide to be a massive FAQ that answers all the questions you have (or don't have yet) about the aggressive streak that you're noticing in your toddler.

If you prefer video lessons where I personally explain EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW about handling your toddler's aggression gently & peacefully, then you should check my 1.5 hour quick course on this topic!





To begin with, let me put your soul at peace by answering your top question!

Is it normal for my child to hit?

Yes, it's absolutely developmentally normal for your 1 year old or 2 or 3 year old to be aggressive in one or more of the ways listed above. You can blame their developing (or under-developed) brain for this kind of impulsive, aggressive behavior.

Is 'toddler hitting' a phase?

Yes & No – While there is a period, usually when your child is 1, 2 or 3 years old when they typically tend to be aggressive; how long this behavior lasts depends to a large extent on your response.

If you meet their aggression with your aggression (hitting or yelling at them for their behavior), this phase will tend to last longer. Even if you see an immediate decline in their aggression towards you (out of fear), you will notice that they resort to hitting or other forms of aggression around other people or kids as a natural defence because they first saw you do it! (Yes, that's the hard fact! ***You can read more about it here*** – *How NOT to handle your toddler's aggression*)

In this guide, you'll learn about the ways in which you can respond to your hitting toddler, so that it's effective in making sure the 'hitting phase' doesn't last for too long.

I can hear you breathe, relieved! almost! Read on, and you'll discover all the What's, Why's and How's.

Let's start with WHY:

Why is my child hitting, biting, kicking, pulling hair and throwing things?

Remember, it might seem that they hit you or the other child "for no reason", but there's always a trigger! Sometimes, the trigger is in the situation, or it could be something pent-up over time. Whether or not you can pinpoint the trigger, ***trust your child – they're not giving you a hard time, they're having a hard time.***

When they hit, their intention is not to hurt or manipulate you into doing or not doing something.

It helps to keep in mind these five points, and remind yourself each time your toddler hits.

I. **It's not intentional**

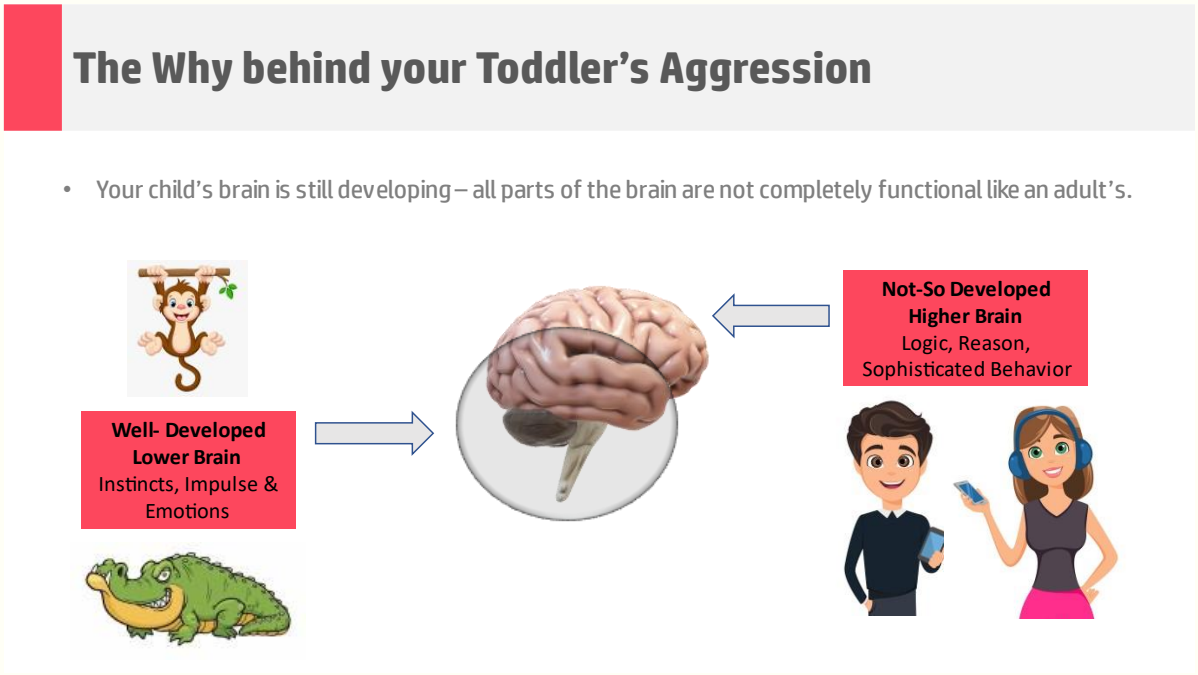
As much as it might seem that your child is acting this way ***on purpose***, that he's doing it ***intentionally***, to make you angry – trust me, he's not. It's his impulsive brain at work, which is not cognitively developed enough to pre-meditate, plan and act in ways that manipulate you.

II. **It's usually experimentative**

Most of the time, hitting/ biting/ throwing/ kicking/ pulling hair is just to see what happens? As silly as it might sound, this is a serious 'experiment' for your child. The way the other person responds is the 'result' he's looking for. And based on that result, they often have the 'urge' to repeat the experiment (maybe with the same/different persons) to just see if the results are consistent, or they may decide to move on to something new.

III. When it's not an experiment, it's just an impulse

To put it simply, (without delving deep, which I do ***in this preview video from my quick course on this topic*** *– A peek into your toddler's brain*) – the part of your toddler's brain that's responsible for self-control or impulse control is poorly developed. So, when they're high on emotions (like anger, frustration or even overwhelming joy) - they really don't know how to express it in a socially acceptable way. Which is why, these emotions often get a physical vent-out – which you experience in the form of hitting, biting, kicking, pulling hair and throwing things.



IV. There are TRIGGERS which lead to the impulse to hit, bite, kick, pull or throw – The most common trigger being 'an emotional high'

Well, positive emotions like overwhelming joy as you cuddle and kiss your child are most welcome. Obviously, a surprise slap or bite on your cheek in the midst of this loving display of affection is unwelcome & can be a trigger for you! We'll see how to deal with that gently & effectively in Part 3 below.

But what about the emotions of anger & frustration that's triggering your child's aggression?

Is it normal for my toddler to feel angry??

You might think, and that's a valid question. Yes, it is normal because your child is human. Your child is capable of feeling ALL emotions. Your child, however, is NOT capable of expressing those emotions responsibly (which you can help your child learn based on how you respond.)

Your toddler is a little soul, new to this planet and its ways. His brain is hard-wired for impulsive (animal-like) responses like hitting, biting, etc. It is our onus to guide him and his brain gently, to help him steer through his emotions and teach him safe ways to express them.

Like renowned psychologist and author of the classic 'Between Parent & Child' - Dr. Haim Ginott says, "Children cannot help how they feel, but they are responsible for the way they express their feelings. Thus, they cannot be held responsible for their feelings, but ONLY for their BEHAVIOR."

To go a step further and deeper – let's think what's making your child become high on emotions like anger, sadness or frustration. ***It's when you know the real trigger that you can fix the trigger, rather than trying to fix your child.***

So, what are some common triggers that cause your child to become overly emotional, which in turn causes them to hit and be aggressive?

- You did not give in to their demand
- You set a limit that they did not like
- A new situation, too many people around
- An unexpected change in routine
- An unmet need – was he hungry, sleepy, tired or overstimulated?
- Or was it a pent-up frustration of needs that have been unmet for a longer time – like the need for attention, connection, a predictable routine or more power and freedom? ***You can read more about 'unmet needs of toddlers' here.***

V. An aggressive breakout is often a CALL for HELP

All forms of aggressive behavior among toddlers is the child's way of saying, "I really don't know how to handle these emotions I'm feeling, I need HELP."

And here's where your response matters.

What to do when my toddler hits? How do I respond?

You want a simple mantra? When your toddler hits -

Accept the emotion, Limit the harmful behavior.

"Ok Sharon! That's a cool mantra! But exactly HOW do I accept the emotion & limit the behavior?"

I hear you! And so, here's the action steps that you can put to work right away. But before I give you the ***tried & tested, recommended by experts - 3-Step Solution*** for your toddler's aggression, here's a word of **CAUTION**: these steps require you to put on patience, and follow the steps consistently, repeating your words & actions in loop till the message sinks in for your toddler! Ready?

When your child hits –

1. Physically & gently block

When you see your toddler coming forth to hit you or someone or himself, whenever possible, physically and gently block his hand BEFORE he hits.

> *Borrowing words of Dr. Haim Ginott, "Young children have genuine difficulty coping with their socially unacceptable impulses. The parents must be an ally in the child's struggle for control of such impulses. By setting limits, the parent offers help to the child. Besides stopping dangerous conduct, the limit also conveys a silent message:* ***You don't have to be afraid of your impulses. I won't let you go too far. It is safe."***

Make sure your toddler is under the supervision of a caregiver, all the time (as far as possible); especially if you've seen a tendency to hit. By staying close enough to the child, it's easier to look for signs and block or respond appropriately when your child hits.

All said, despite best efforts and supervision, it is possible that your child hits someone / himself. What do you do then? Read on.

2. Self-talk to calm down

Your toddler's aggression could be a trigger for you, making you feel angry or embarrassed. You might feel an 'impulsive' urge to scold or hit back.

When your child hits you, your brain subconsciously goes into the impulsive & instinctive Fight/Flight Mode, where there's no rational thinking involved. When that happens – technically, you and your toddler are at the same mental level and you will experience a strong and almost automatic urge to hit back. If you do hit, you might also try to rationalize it later by saying, "How could he hit me. I'm bigger than him."

While it's natural for you to feel this way, this is the time when you will need to be calm and prove that you're the 'mature' adult who has control over her impulses. This is the time to prove that you're bigger & stronger, not just physically but also emotionally. And so, it's important to **"Control yourself before you control your child." DO NOT hit back.**

The simplest way to practice this is - take a deep breath and talk to yourself for a few seconds like -

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"This is not an emergency. I can handle this. I can help my child get over this."

"My child needs me to be calm right now."

"I am not worried about what people will say or think. Right now, my child is having a hard time and so he hit. I will be calm for him."

If required, hand your child to another family member, and walk away for a few minutes till you can calm down yourself. Then come back 'emotionally' stronger to help your child through the situation. **Anchor your emotions first, before you help your child with his.**

Same goes, if your child hit himself or someone else in your presence, or you get a complaint about it later.

3. Time-in with your gentle action & words

Your child is high on emotions, and that's why he hit. In such a situation, the best antidote in a calm parent's warm presence.

So, lift your child up in your arms or reach down to his eye level, gently hold your child's arms down and explain in simple words, "You seem angry right now, it's ok to be angry, it's not ok to hit someone. You can punch this pillow instead."

If your child is still resisting or hitting, it's best to stay close as you hold her hands down gently – preventing any harm to you or your child. During such times, words are not really necessary. With little children, actions speak louder than your words. Here you'll offer your support by just 'being present' and helping him regulate his emotions in your warm & calm presence.

You can also offer your child safe alternatives to release his emotional energy like like hitting a pillow, stomping their feet while punching the sky, doing an angry dance, or throwing balls into a basket.

Consistently repeating the above actions & words, not only helps your child know that it's not acceptable to hit – but also takes the fun element out of it for kids who hit as an experiment, just to see what 'new' reaction you'll give them this time.

While I've chosen 'toddler hitting' as an example, this 3-Step Solution works for all kinds of toddler aggression like biting, kicking, pulling hair, throwing things or whatever your toddler is into!

What exactly should I say when my toddler hits?

With little children, actions speak louder than words. So, your first response needs to be offering your warm presence and closeness when you find your toddler being aggressive (like we discussed in 'Time-In' above.)

Also, being too verbose or using a lot of jargon, or commanding your child from across the room to stop hitting / throwing are completely futile moves. It's best to avoid them. In the heat of the moment, when your child is experiencing an emotional high, his brain is technically not ready for processing words. So, whatever you say, make sure you choose a calm moment to really make it a 'teachable' moment.

So, keeping this in mind - What can you say?

The key is to:

KISS (Keep it short & simple),

LEO (Set the Limit, Accept the Emotion, Offer Alternatives) &

REPEAT the same phrase every time you find your child in the same situation.

One or more of the below phrases can help you use your voice & words effectively in a way that teaches your toddler, what's ok & what's not.

Setting the limit (Conveys your confidence)

- I can't let you ____, because it ____ .

  I can't let you hit me, because it hurts

  I'm sorry, I can't let you throw blocks, it's too dangerous / it can hurt someone.

Saying what you see & Accepting emotions (Conveys your empathy)

- I see that you're _____, do you want to _____?.

  I see that you're upset, do you want to leave and go back home?

  (You can also replace the question with an affirmative statement like, "Let's go home and come back when you feel better)

Suggesting what to do, instead of pointing out what not to do (Teaches them what's acceptable)

- The blocks are for playing, not for throwing (This is better than saying, "Don't throw blocks.")
- It's more fun to clap with these beautiful hands (and not hit).
- If you want to pull hair, this doll's hair is safe to pull.

My toddler doesn't speak yet. Will he really understand when I say, "It's not Ok to hit."

Children begin to understand language much before they can speak. So, your toddler can make sense of what you say, more so, based on your expressions, actions and the context.

When you repeat the same action & words in the same scenarios again & again & again – they get it! They're really geniuses when it comes to figuring out & learning what to do & what not to do.

Also, the words you use in these circumstances serve a few important purposes:

1. Your tone conveys your calm confidence, assuring your child that you (the parent) are capable of helping him get through this storm of emotions.

2. It helps him know that the emotions/feelings he's experiencing are completely normal and acceptable, and that he can express them SAFELY, without causing harm. Thus, we 'Build Up', not bring down his self-esteem by accepting his emotions and showing him better ways of expressing them.

It helps to remember that - "The way we talk to our children becomes their inner voice" – Peggy O'mara.

Your child will internalize the words you tell him, and your calm, empathizing voice – and that's what will help him self-soothe and overcome his aggressive impulses alone, over time.

What about Time-Out, is that a good way to teach my toddler not to hit?

Not really! By now, you know that your toddler is not being aggressive on purpose. He just cannot help it, when he experiences a gush of raw emotions that his young brain can't handle. This is the time when your child needs your help. Sending you little toddler away is like abandoning him to figure out his emotions himself, when he needs you the most!

While punishment & fear-induced methods like time-out work in the short run, experts say that it fails in the long run. Your child will fail to develop moral strength & character, by which he 'chooses' not to hit because it hurts, and not because he wants to avoid punishment. The impending danger here is when there's no one to punish, your child could go on a free ride taking out his pent-up anger on anyone. So, it's best to deal with

your child's aggression with a non-aggressive TIME-IN – a peaceful and respectful approach that serves well in the long run.

I'm a working Mom, and my child is with another caregiver? How should the hitting be handled in that case?

In that case, it's important for you to empower the caregiver with this information that you're learning. Start by informing the adult with whom the child is entrusted, about the child's tendency to hit, and that it's best if he/she can gently block before the child can hit. It's better for you to declare and help the person anticipate a hit and block, rather than you feeling embarrassed and sorry later. The 3-step solution can be implemented by anyone your child is entrusted with.

My toddler is verbal, how can I teach him to apologize whenever he has hurt someone knowingly or unknowingly?

It surely is embarrassing when your child hits someone else, and at times, it can be dangerous too if little kids are at the receiving end. However, in such situations, as tempted as you might feel to force an apology out of your child – it's futile & in vain.

In the moment, if this happens in your presence – the 3-Step Solution will be handy. Along with a key piece of *'modelling' manners*. The best way to teach manners to young kids is to 'model' it. You can apologize to the person/child who was hit, or to the other child's parent – and reassure that you're doing your best to help your child overcome this behavior.

All this, as you hold your child close to you – letting her know you're here to help, and that while her behavior is unacceptable, you still love her.

If you find your child repeating the offence, take your child away from the spot and spend some time-in, helping your child calm down. This also subtly suggests to your child that 'hitting is not acceptable, and that we cannot play if we hit.', you don't even have to say this out loud.

If you had to say something, "Looks like you're feeling angry (whatever emotion), it's ok to feel angry, but it's not ok to hit. I'm going to move you away for a while to keep you and others safe."

If the incident happened in your absence, once again - you will 'model manners', and reassure that you're doing your best to help your child overcome this behavior. Short & Simple!

> *It's also a great idea to invoke your child's problem-solving skills (if all is calm) by saying, "Max was really hurt when you hit. What can we do to make him feel better?" Pause for your child to respond. If your child is unable to come up with ideas, you can suggest and help your child put it into action, like – "Shall we give him this toy and say we're sorry."*
>
> *Or*
>
> *"You were really angry back then because you wanted the toy that Max had. It's ok to feel angry, but it's not ok to hit. What are some ways in which we can ask when we want a toy from someone?"*

In any situation, do not bad-mouth your child in front of others, complaining about how you've tried everything but he still keeps repeating it. Keep it short and formal, and take your child away from the spot, so you can deal with your child's behavior.

Pro-Tip: Your child believes what you believe about her, and she will behave in ways to prove your belief right.

So, be careful about what you say about your child!

What are some SAFE alternatives I can offer to my child in place of hitting, throwing, biting to express emotions?

Offering safe alternatives is a KEY step that parents often miss. We are quick to point out WHAT NOT TO DO, but often we forget to help our child know what she CAN DO instead.

They are bubbling with energy all the time (as you might have already realized by now), and they have this strong urge to test & explore. By giving them safe alternatives, we're keeping their explorative spirit alive while also making sure it's safe for them & others around.

So, instead of saying, "Stop doing that!"

Try this, "Looks like you're feeling playful, that's nice. But it's not safe to jump on the chair. You can jump on the floor instead."

The key is to Offer Safe Alternatives as an outlet for their energy & emotions.

Redirect your child to a similar activity that's SAFE – like:

Hitting you → Hit a pillow

Biting → Bite into a carrot or teether

Throwing things → Throw a ball

Kicking → Kick a ball

Pulling your hair → Pull a doll's hair

If your child is verbal and receptive to what you're saying, this is also a good time to teach your child what to SAY next time he feels the urge to hit. You can tell her these are ways in which she can express her emotions in ways that are SAFE for her and others around her.

- He can use his words and say, "I feel sad/angry/very happy."
- He can run to Mommy and give a hug or ask for a hug, or give a Hi-Five.
- He can clap 5 times.

Get creative and find ways that you feel are most appropriate for your child to understand and follow.

Depending on how old your child is, he may or may not completely understand this. He may also not be able to control his impulses every time, even after you've explained to him multiple times.

And that is why, toddlers need us to stay on their side and help them stop rather than telling them they need to stop. They don't have the skills or the self-control to be able to stop themselves. They really don't.

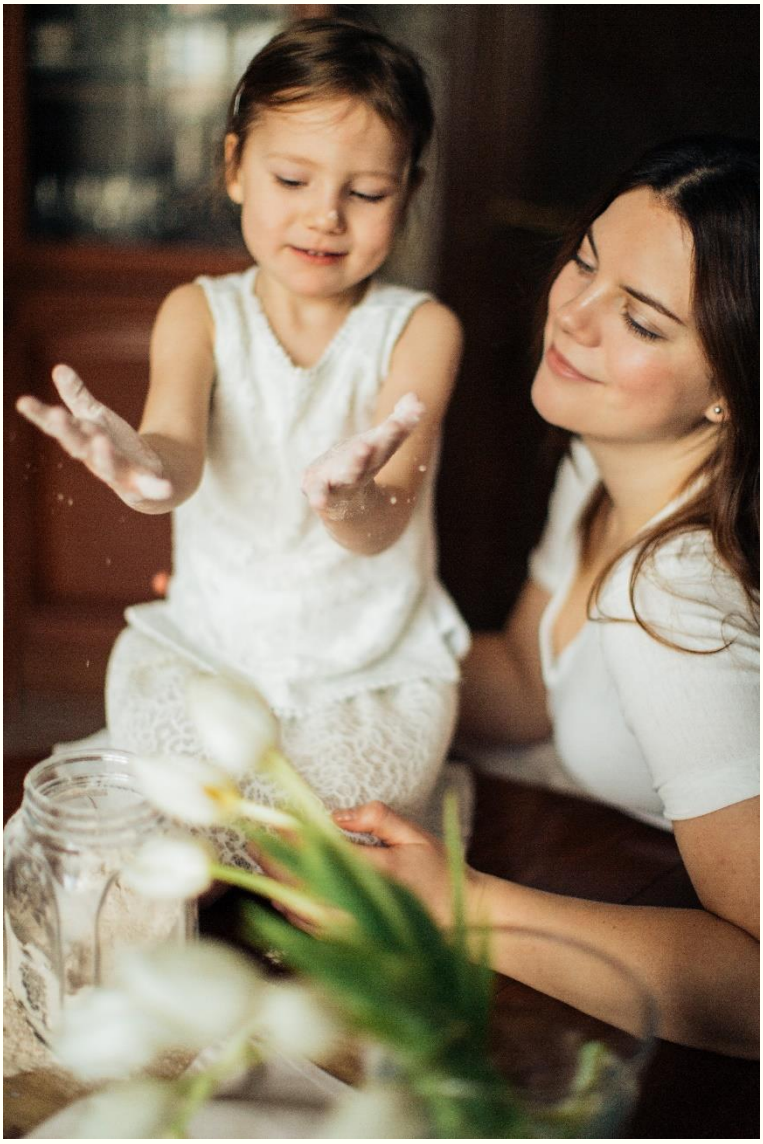
You will need to be patient, and REPEAT your gentle words & actions in the same way, each time – till your child's brain gets wired the right way to act maturely and responsibly when he feels the urge to hit.

Usually, by the time they're 3 to 3.5 years old, they get over this – IF they receive your empathetic and loving support during their bad phase.

The key message in the entire interaction is to

CONNECT before you CORRECT.

Having a deep connection with your child, where you understand his said & unsaid needs, and stay present for him when he needs you most (that is, in his worst moments and worst behavior) – goes a long way in building your child's morale, confidence, self-esteem and also in his mental, emotional and cognitive development.



What are some warning signs that I can look for to prevent aggressive breakouts?

Yes, there are warning signs which will tell you when your child is just about to 'lose it'. These are signs that will tell you that your toddler is 'needing' something, that she's unable to communicate.

The communication happens through their body in the form of crankiness, rubbing their eyes, being too jumpy, being sluggish, or in the form of irrational demands like wanting the 'pink plate' ONLY and nothing else. Each of these signs communicate an 'unmet need' like below.

Crankiness → Feeling hungry, sleepy or tired → Need food / rest / sleep

Rubbing eyes → Feeling sleepy / overstimulated by screentime → Need rest

Being too jumpy → Overstimulated / Seeking attention → Need rest / attention

Being sluggish → Feeling tired → Need rest

Irrational demands → Any of the above / Feeling angry and frustrated → Need power through choices.

If the need is not decoded & met early, it will snowball into more difficult forms of behavior like aggression & tantrum.

This is a key piece when it comes to preventing aggressive behavior. Decoding the early warning signs & meeting these needs will help you save your sanity and help your child be the playful, cheerful bub that she naturally is!

Dr. Mona Delahooke, a paediatric psychologist describes disruptive behaviors as "just the tip of the iceberg,". They are important signals a child may be sending that are symptoms of an underlying issue. In other words, aggressive behaviors have an underlying reason or trigger.

The first time your child hits, you might be taken by surprise. But once you're through that experience, it helps to think about what could have been the possible triggers.

- Was your child hungry, sleepy, tired?
- Was he overstimulated or overjoyed?
- Was he craving for attention & connection?
- Was he frustrated for lack of control or power over simple things?

It helps to take a guess, and make a mental or written note about it. Each time your child hits (hopefully, that won't be many times if you've read and implemented the steps here) – repeat the process of identifying the signs & trigger.

*I explain this in MUCH detail in my **free ebook – "Know your toddler's needs".** It's one of my most popular eBooks, and for a reason! I highly recommend you read that if you'd like to master the art of decoding & meeting your toddler's needs so they stay HAPPIE!*

With each experience, you will prepare yourself to ANTICIPATE situations and circumstances, when your child might have an impulse to hit, and take preventive measures to avoid them.

For instance, if you know your child gets overwhelmed when there are too many people around, and tends to release his fear by hitting someone – you'd do well to take him away to a quieter place, rather than have him there and lose his control.

My child is hyperactive? How can I include help him release his playful energy in a constructive way, rather than aggression & destructions?

Your toddler is a bundle of energy, as you have already noticed. Placing too many restrictions on their physical play and exploration (for the fear of being hurt), can frustrate your child.

As you would have learnt by now, aggressive behavior emerges when toddlers experience a gush of strong positive / negative emotions. As you observe and tune into your toddler, you will gradually be able to notice signs of overwhelm, and when you do – it's best to proactively provide your tiny tot with positive and safe outlets of energy that will help him calm the storm within him.

I've borrowed the below list of ideas from 'What to Expect – The Toddler Years' – by Heidi Murkoff and Sharon Mazel.

It is also a good idea to incorporate some of these activities in your daily routine, for instance, before lunch, you & your child can indulge in some indoor physical activities and the evenings can be for outdoor fun.

Make sure these activities are FUN for you & your child, and that you don't do them like a prescribed TASK, your toddler is sure to resist it then. But FUN, they can never resist!

Indoor Outlets of Energy	Outdoor Outlets of Energy
Punching a pillow	Free play – running, jumping, climbing
Drumming on pots or vessels	Playground play – swings, slides
Pounding or hammering toys	Ball kicking and throwing
Pounding clay / playdoh	Rolling an oversized ball
Dancing to lively music	Pedalling or cycling
Splashing in the tub	Splashing in a pool
Pillow fights in a safe space	Splashing in puddles
Tumbling or rough play on a carpet or bed, safely	Pulling out weeds from the garden
Lively circle games & action songs	Circle games
Running around in the house	
'How high can you jump?'	
'How far can you jump?'	
Kiddie aerobics – toe-touches, jumping jacks, head-shoulder-knees-toes, clapping	

How can I get my toddler to calm down, and be less 'hyper'?

Once again, it's best to incorporate some of these relaxation techniques into your child's daily routine, to help her calm her nerves. It can also lay the foundation for a good meditative habit in the long term.

It's ok if your child seems uninterested in these activities in the beginning. Be consistent, do not force, rather do the activities yourself. You will gradually see your toddler join you. Keep it positive!

Source: 'What to Expect – The Toddler Years' – by Heidi Murkoff and Sharon Mazel.

Relaxation Activities To Help Toddlers Calm Down	
Hugging, cuddling or massage	**Baking or cooking (with supervision)**
Soft music with or without lyrics	Water play
A relaxing story	Watching fish in a fishtank, or watching nature from the window
A warm bath (with supervision)	Petting a gentle pet
Playing simple puzzles (only if your toddler doesn't seem to be frustrated by them)	Doodling, painting with fingers/brush/earbuds
Interaction with a calm parent or caregiver	Clay Play

Here's a simple parent-child meditation routine that you can establish over time – Both of you lie down, close your eyes, breathe in and out, guide your child to concentrate on his breath. Picture quiet, pleasant places. Guide your toddler by saying "I'm thinking about the beach. Can you feel the sand under your feet?...." Involve all their senses, to help them visualize & calm down.

Other ideas I've tried myself – playing with water balloons in a tub / bucket, free play with air balloons – tossing them, taking them around, blowing bubbles, blowing a whistle, popping bubble wrap, tearing newspaper, scribbling, involving

in daily chores like washing rice & vegetables, playing with a small piece of dough. These have been life-saving activities that made sure my daughter was productively & safely engaged. She had FUN, and I had my SANITY!

Tackling other aggressive behaviors

While I've taken 'Toddler Hitting' as an example to explain the 3-Step Solution, what to do, and what to say - The fundamental principles remain the same while you tackle any other form of aggression.

To make it easier for you, I've put down all possible forms of aggression that you could see in your toddler – what to do & what to say in each of those situations! So, you're all covered!

Throwing

Throwing is a developmentally correct skill that your toddler must learn, however, it's important to set limits on what can & cannot be thrown.

- Practice throwing with different kinds of balls
- Whenever you child throws something that's forbidden:
    - [Act] Calmly take the thing away
    - [Speak] Gently explain, "I can't let you throw that, you can throw this ball instead."
- If you find your child throwing things in anger, it's best to identify the trigger whenever possible, accept the feelings and deal with the behavior, using the action plan detailed above for hitting.

Pushing

Lack of advanced verbal skills and impulse control causes toddlers to behave in crude and socially unacceptable ways. Pushing is one such behavior, it might just be to make someone move or they might just be touching. However, one innocent push from over the slide can cause serious accidents, so it's important to teach your child learn safer and better ways.

- Practice touching gently with family members, pets or toys
- Block whenever possible, and calmly explain the natural consequences of pushing someone.
- Encourage her to use words like 'Excuse me', to tell people to move.

My daughter would often meet a new friend, and the first thing she would do was - push the child. The first few times, I was surprised with this behavior because she is quite friendly otherwise. Later, I would be ready to block her hand before she could push. It was much later that I realized, she was just trying to touch her new friend, but did not know how to do it gently.

Hairpulling

Pulling a bunch of hair that's in close proximity is often a natural impulse, sometimes an outlet for a gush of emotions.

You can provide several other appropriate opportunities for your toddler to pull or flex the muscles of his fist. For example, sensory play with sand or playdoh, washing rice in water, pulling out weeds from the garden.

When caught in the act of pulling hair:

- [Act] Calmly untangle her fingers from the person's hair.
- [Speak] Gently explain, "I can't let you pull my/her hair. This doll's hair is safe to pull.

Biting

The reasons & triggers behind biting are the same as those for hitting – it's usually an experiment or an impulse arising out of overwhelming positive / negative emotions. Additionally, sometimes teething pain can also cause toddlers to bite people, objects or surfaces.

- Provide safe objects to bite – a carrot stick, candy or popsicle.
- Never bite back, nor indulge in playfully biting your toddler's fingers and toes. Your child blindly emulates you; she is not mature enough to know the intention.

Block before she can bite, however if found biting:

- [Act] Calmly and quickly separate the biter & the victim
- [Act] Apologize and offer comfort to the victim (but don't overdo it).
- [Speak] Gently explain, "I can't let you bite me/her. That hurts. I'm going to have to put you down/take you away from her to keep you & me/her safe. I'll get something else that you can bite safely."

A simple way to remember the action plan to address any form of aggression in your child is:

BLOCK – Then TALK

My toddler has the habit of banging his head or hurting himself? What can I do?

I understand how worrisome this can be for you, but it is also a surprisingly common toddler behavior. Experts say, that it's a self-soothing mechanism that helps your toddler relieve his anger or pain (due to teething,etc.). ***You can read more about it in this article by Babycenter.***

Below is a quick action plan for you to adopt to keep your child safe.

Block : Limit the behavior

- Place your hand / pillow between your child & the floor/wall to prevent hurt from banging

Then Talk :

- Accept the emotions: Looks like you're feeling angry because __, it's ok to feel angry.
- Offer safe alternatives: I can't let your hurt yourself, so I'm going to place this pillow here & be with you to keep you safe.

My child is often aggressive with his sibling & other kids. What should I do?

Block : Limit the behavior

- Separate toddler & sibling / other child

Then Talk:

- Accept the emotions: Looks like you're feeling angry because you wanted that toy, it's ok to feel angry.
- Offer safe alternatives: It's not ok to hurt someone. What's a better way to ask for the toy?

Model the desired behavior: Hold your child close &

- Say Sorry to the other child – "We're so sorry, we pulled the toy and hurt you."
- Ask the other child - "Can we have the toy when you're done? Meanwhile what else can we play with?"

My toddler is very aggressive with his baby sister, mostly playfully, sometimes out of anger it looks like. How can I teach him to be gentle with the baby?

Block : Limit the behavior

- Separate toddler & baby

Then Talk:

- Accept the emotions: Looks like you're feeling playful, it's ok to feel playful.

- Offer safe alternatives: it's not ok to hurt someone. You can play with baby by gently holding her hands, like this.
- Place both kids at the same level, Tell baby: "Always be gentle with Max, ok!"

My child is often aggressive with ME only, I don't understand why and how to handle it?

Well, experts say that your child releasing his "bad" behaviors with a preferred parent or caregiver is a sign that they consider you as their SAFE space. They believe you can take it, and still love them. Well, you can take that as a compliment!

At the same time, it's also important to help them know that their aggression whether it's hitting, kicking or biting – hurts you, and that it's not ok to hurt anyone. It's best to then follow the action plan just like you would in any other scenario.

Block : Limit the behavior

- Block (before), and hold your toddler's hands down gently
- Hand child to another caregiver, if you feel triggered / angry towards your toddler. Calm yourself down & then be back.

Then Talk:

- Accept the emotions: "Looks like you were feeling angry / sad / playful, it's ok to feel that way."
- Offer safe alternatives: It's not ok to hurt someone. Next time, you feel angry, you say, I'm feeling angry, make a fist and punch the air like this to let me know.

My child is hits or bites and then laughs as if he's deriving some evil pleasure out of it. How should I handle this?

Often parents find that their child hits someone and smiles or laughs, as if he's deriving some evil pleasure out of this. But experts say that, the smile is usually out of embarrassment or discomfort for not being able to control themselves, thereby unintentionally hurting someone. It's a sign of their innocence & helplessness.

So, trust your child's innocence & naïve developing brain, and offer your help.

Block : Limit the behavior

- Block (before), and hold your toddler's hands down gently
- Hand child to another caregiver, if you feel triggered / angry towards your toddler. Calm yourself down & then be back.

Then Talk:

- Accept the emotions: "Looks like you were playful, it's ok to feel that way."
- Offer safe alternatives: It's not ok to hurt someone. Next time, you feel playful – come to Mumma & say, I want to play." (or offer a sign that even your pre-verbal toddler can use to indicate he wants to play with you.)

Aggression with toys

As long as your child is not hurting people or damaging property, it's safe if your child is aggressive with toys. He's probably found a safe way to release his anxiety or it might just be him practicing throwing or experimenting, as usual.

If you find the aggression escalating into harmful behavior that hurts people or damages property, it's important to set the limits like you've learnt above. Or if you find the

aggression with toys turning into a obsession wherein throughout his playtime, he's just throwing the teddy against the wall, and poking out eyes out of dolls – it's best to speak with a doctor to know if all is well.

Aggressive friends (When your child is the victim)

It is possible that your child encounters other children who are aggressive, how can you protect your child from being hurt physically and emotionally?

If you're present in the situation, allow your child to act and speak for herself, before you speak for her. If the kids seem to have resolved the issue amongst themselves, it's best to let it go and not create a scene or an issue out of it.

However, if your child seems to be physically hurt or emotionally disturbed by the aggressive encounter – you can pitch in respectfully and MODEL the right behavior for all kids in question. Speak to the other kids about hitting/pushing, like how you would speak to your own. Involve the other parent/parents ONLY if you find that the other kids are not co-operating.

If you're worried about how your child will protect herself when you're not around, you can teach her that if another child tried to hurt her, first block if she can, then say, "No, I can't let you hit me.", and report the incident to the nearest adult-in-charge.

To summarize:

Block : Limit the behavior

- If you're in close proximity, you will immediately separate your child from the hitter.
- If you come to know about it later, you'll teach your child to block, move away & talk to an elder.

Then Talk:

- Accept the emotions: “Zeph hit you because he was angry. Did it hurt!?”
- Offer safe alternatives: It’s not ok to hit, right? Next time, someone hits you – you’ll raise your hands like this, block & say, “NO! You can’t hit me.” And you’ll move away to tell about it to Ms. Mary immediately.

Destructive behavior

Often, you’ll find toddlers tearing up magazines, opening up the remote or drawing on walls. These behaviors often stem out of curiosity and the toddler’s natural zest for experiments.

However, it’s important to help your toddler understand the natural consequences of his actions (Eg. The TV remote stops working when you open it up / throw it). You can also provide safe spaces for him to explore and experiment with (Eg. A bunch of old newspapers to tear, an amazon box to paint on). Involve your toddler in cleaning up the mess too, by asking for ‘help’!

The 3-Step Solution : Block Then Talk – everything you’ve learnt so far, works in all of these situations. Just make sure you keep calm & stay consistent.

At times, your toddler might vent out his frustrations and anxiety by tossing over a cup of coffee or a bunch of blocks. At times, the frustration might just be because of something seemingly silly, like he wasn’t able to stack the blocks as nicely as he expected. It is not always possible to pinpoint your toddler’s trigger or intentions, but if

you sense anger and frustration in his destructive behavior, it will help to go through this article to know if there are any unmet needs that are causing your child to over-react.

The Secret Move

This is what works with my daughter (most of the time)!

Whenever I find her agitated or cranky, (she's usually pretty playful and calm) - I lift her up, sit or lie down with her and start some game that involves a lot of hugging, cuddling, tickling and giggling.

It could be anything from a monster or shark attack to Santa Claus trying to make kids laugh. I've seen that it instantly releases whatever negative emotions she was battling with, and can then go back to being the playful soul she is. I'd recommend reading about **'Special Time'** here.

When she has the urge to hit repeatedly, I often hold her in my arms tightly and turn it into a game, where she has to release herself from my arms. The energy she exerts to release herself, often also releases her anxieties / frustration / overwhelm which was causing her to hit.

Or sometimes, I show her my palms and say, "Let me see how hard you can clap on my hands." This also helps in releasing the itch to hit.

What I want my child to know and learn:

My goal is to empower you (the parent) to successfully and peacefully handle your toddler's challenging behaviors as and when they arise. You will be able to quickly respond to your toddler's behaviors (without any expert help) if you have your fundamental vision in place.

You can be more confident as a parent by asking yourself, "With my response, what do I want my child to know and learn?"

Here are some pointers for you, as you deal with your child's aggression.

With my response to his aggression, I want my child to know that

1. *I understand your pain. I'm always there for you as an anchored ship and I can help you through any storm.*

2. *You don't have to be afraid of feelings, you just have to express them responsibly and safely.*

3. *My love for you is unconditional. Bad behavior does not make you a bad child, and it does not make me love you less.*



Final tips for best results:

1. Be consistent

"Our children are counting on us to provide two things - Consistency & Structure. Children need parents who say what they mean, mean what they say, and do what they say they are going to do." – Barbara Coloroso.

So, your response to your child's behavior needs to be consistent, the same, each time, every time! Stay kind and firm (not stern) on the limits that you set, your child needs that solid ground.

2. Connect before correct, block before talk.

You make the most impact on your child, when you've connected with them emotionally, by accepting and understanding their dilemma. And your child will

remember your actions more than your words. So, connect before you correct, and let your 'gentle' actions speak louder than your words.

3. Model the right behavior

"Don't worry that children never listen to you; worry that they are always watching you." – Robert Fulghum.

You can teach your kids most, by just acting and behaving with them and others the way you'd like them to behave. It's actually that simple, yet so tough!

My daughter would often throw things at us, mostly for fun. We didn't realize why she was doing it till one day, I observed that my husband had the habit of throwing, too. If I asked for the remote, he would throw that into my hands from a distance! And my daughter was just trying to emulate!

4. Repeat the moves, as many times as you have to.

Do not expect your child to remember your instructions or explanations, they're not yet mentally capable for that. You will need to pitch in and provide your support with your presence, action and words – as many times as you have to. This is how you help their brain make important connections about what to do and what not to do, through Repetition.

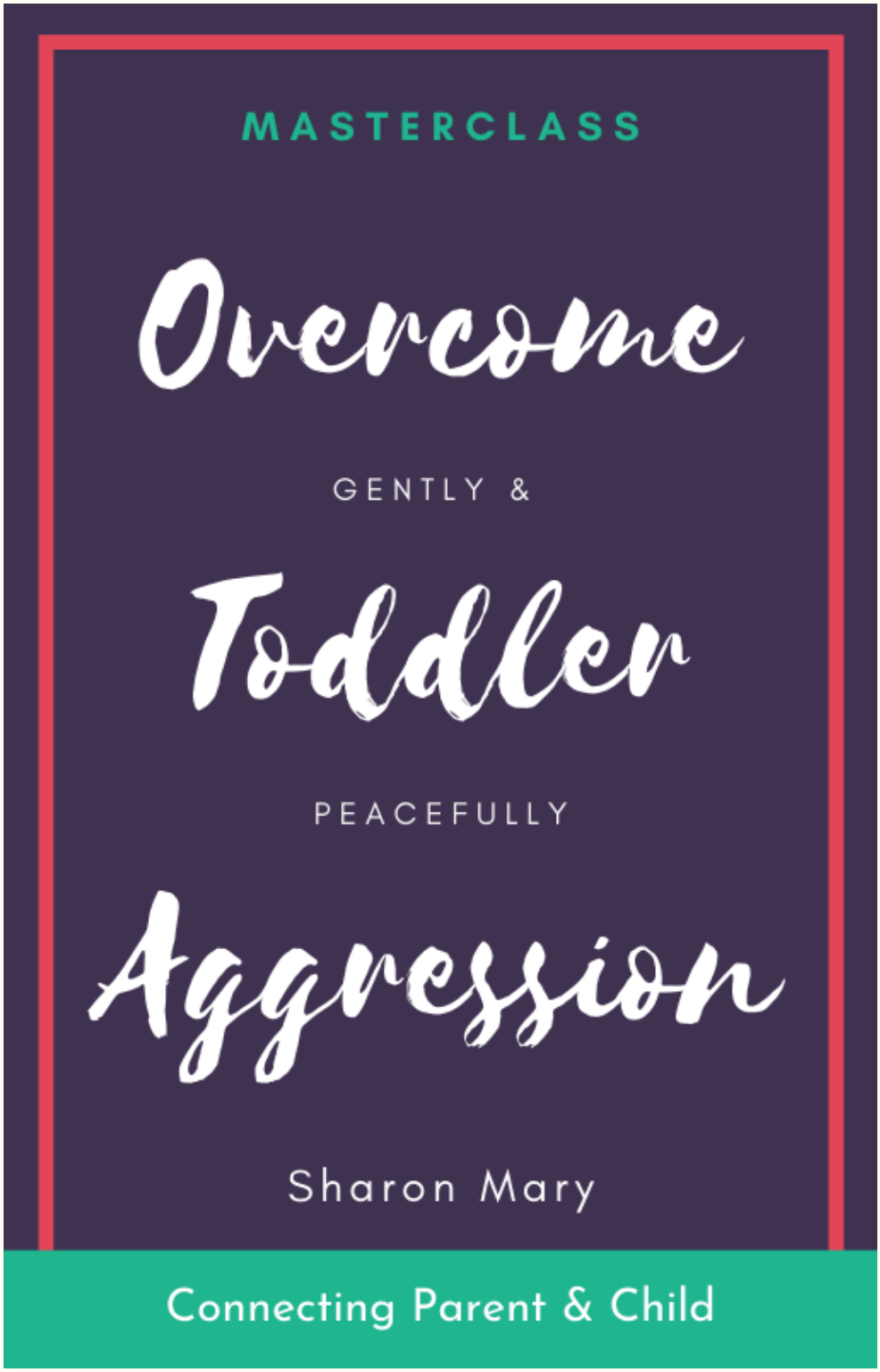
5. Do not act out of social expectations

If your child happens to hit another child in your presence, it's almost as if suddenly everyone is watching you, judging you and expecting you to punish your child for her behavior. DO NOT give into this.

Your child is more important than a bunch of strangers. So, stay focussed on helping your little one through the tough time that she's having with her emotions, rather than trying to please some random onlookers.

Before you go, let me tell you a bit about the quick course that I created to help you know everything you need to know in as little as 1.5 hours.

Click here to know how you could put your child down for a nap & by the time she wakes up; you're wiser & smarter, ready for all the blows, bites & punches waiting for you!!



There’s also plenty of useful resources for you at my website:

connectingparentandchild.com



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Book A Consultation

FOR PERSONALIZED SOLUTIONS

Every child is unique given the unique setting of each family. While I've tried to provide a comprehensive solution here, it is possible that you're facing a unique situation that requires a more customized solution.

I'd love to offer you my personal advice



through an
ONLINE
CONSULTATION

TO BOOK A CONSULTATION

Send in your parenting concern to
sharon@connectingparentandchild.com.

Our team will get in touch with you to provide necessary details and to confirm your appointment.

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