



The Early Years: Impulse Control

Impulse control, sometimes called self-regulation, refers to a child's ability to control his or her behavior. It is natural for young children to show a mix of strong emotions: excitement, joy, anger, frustration, and disappointment. An important part of growing up is learning to show these emotions at appropriate times and in appropriate ways. Children who learn to control their anger and frustration and to use words to express their feelings get along better with others than children who do not learn these skills. Children who learn to control their impulses also have fewer behavior problems during their school years.

You can help your children learn impulse control by:

- *Making it clear that hurting others is not allowed.* When a child gets mad playing a game and pushes or hits another child, parents should first make sure that the other child is safe, and then let both children know that hurting others is not permitted. If necessary, parents can remove the aggressive child from the situation. Parents can set a good example by not overreacting to the child who has been hitting.
- *Providing words that children can use to express their feelings.* For example, when a child gets mad while playing a game, parents can encourage the child to use words that express strong feelings, such as "That really makes me mad!" or "I don't like it when you play the game that way!"
- *Helping children think of new methods for resolving problems.* Parents may want to suggest and supervise options, such as helping children to take turns or to share a toy.
- *Encouraging children to consider the needs of others.* When parents point out how pushing or hitting hurts others, they teach valuable lessons about consideration and empathy. These early lessons will help a child develop friendships and avoid violent encounters with others later in life.

If you have concerns about your child's development of impulse control, you can talk to child care teachers and providers, pediatricians, nurses, school teachers, or other school staff. They may be able to advise you whether your child's impulse control problem requires professional attention.

The information contained in this summary is taken from the Early Years chapter of the Violence Prevention Resource Guide for Parents by Peggy Patten and Anne S. Robertson (Champaign, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education, 2001).

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