# Important tips to manage aggression in children

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A child, who wanted to be perceived as the strongest of all, would speak loudly, look angry and hit everyone to prove his strength. When his grandfather came to visit, he behaved in the same way with him. However, his grandpa was never agitated and just smiled at his actions. The child was bewildered as he was only used to getting yelled at for what he did. The more he was yelled at, the stronger he would become, is what he thought!

## ****Grandpa shares the Buddha story****

The grandfather asked him if he would like to hear a story and the boy agreed. “Once upon a time, there was an enlightened master called Buddha. He travelled across the country teaching people how to be peaceful. Once while he was going through a forest, a tribesman called Angulimala came to him. He was a frightening man. He wore a garland of fingers of people whom he had sacrificed so he would be the strongest and feared the most. He wanted to have Buddha’s finger as the hundredth and complete his sacrificing ritual. Buddha smiled at him and said, “I am happy to be of use to you”. There was no trace of fear in him. Nobody had ever smiled at Angulimala. No one had ever spoken to him so kindly. The very presence of Buddha did something to him. Angulimala felt very weak for the first time in his life. He felt like a feather in front of a mountain. He realised that real strength is in having unshakable calmness, peace, and in compassion. He fell at Buddha’s feet. He was changed completely.” The child listened to every word from his grandpa with rapt attention.

## ****Look out for the media children are exposed to****

When you feel helpless or weak, the need to assert your strength comes out as violence. Where do children get the idea of violence? They see their parents, neighbours, friends, and so many programmes on TV or videos on the mobile phone — all this exposure leaves impressions and has a strong impact on the minds of children, more than we know. They are sensitive even to suppressed violence. If you are angry inside but still act as if everything is okay, children will know it.

## ****Handling aggression****

Children get angry or show aggression for seemingly very silly reasons. But the real reason is something else, a sense of insecurity that has crept in somehow. That is why in olden days, parents would never show anger in front of a child. They would not even argue or use harsh words. Public display of anger was considered a weakness. Today, anger and aggression comes up at the drop of a hat. Any minor difference of opinion is enough to prompt the arrows to fly. We don’t know how to draw a line between expressing a difference of opinion and displaying aggression. If your child is aggressive, look into your own lifestyle. What are you doing? Are you yelling at your housekeeper or at your pet? Are you yelling at your own spouse? Or any one for that matter in front of the child? Are you sad? What is your reaction? And it does not matter that out of the 365 days, you have acted in aggression may be only a couple of times. Those few days are equally important for the child. This is why we need to meditate and practice *pranayama* or deep breathing techniques. Heyum Dukham Anagatam — stopping the misery before it comes — that is the benefit of yoga, because in life prevention is better than cure.

## ****Engaging children in meaningful activities****

The other important thing is to engage them in meaningful activities, and sports that allow them to channel their energy constructively. Just playing video games or watching TV with no physical activity only increases restlessness and makes them prone to aggression. You will notice that the day your child has more screen time, the more difficult he or she becomes to handle. Encourage them to go out and play, engage with real people, run and fill their lungs with some fresh air. In the olden days, movies were classified as suitable for watching only under parental guidance. Parents would control what a child can see. Today, it is a common occurrence that the elders are all engrossed in watching soaps on TV and are oblivious to the child who is also watching and taking in all the exaggerated emotions that are projected. It is very important to be sensitive about what their tender senses are exposed to. They should not be bombarded with heavy impressions.

## ****What kind of stories are we telling our children?****

To develop a sound value system, tell them stories. For very small children, perhaps around three or four, stories should be pleasant, free of fighting and violence, about animals and nature, sharing and caring. When they are five or six it is okay to introduce stories with good people and ‘bad’ people. Every culture has its stories of heroes who protected the innocent and fought villains who were up to no good. Through these stories they understand that the purpose of strength is to protect and not to hurt. They learn that the hero, the stronger one, is calm and collected.

## ****Appreciate!****

While it is important to reprimand anger, it is equally important to recognise when they are gentle and appreciate them. When I was a child and would sometimes get angry, my grandmother would ask me to go to a certain corner of the house and leave my anger there. She would say that the angel in that corner would take the anger from me and go far, far away. I would believe her, go stand there and in a minute, come back smiling! Schools today don’t teach children how to deal with negative emotions. This is an important aspect of moulding the character of the child. Teachers should be strict about encouraging the right attitude in children. They should recognise the strength of a child who is able to walk away from a fight and not just react and hit back. They should reward and give attention to calmness in a child. Many times, an aggressive attitude in a child comes out from simply wanting attention. So, you can teach them by ignoring their sulking or shouting, and praising them and giving extra attention when they are well-mannered. And parents should give teachers the space to discipline the child if necessary. It is okay if your child has been naughty and the teacher has disciplined him or her. Parents must encourage reverence towards the teacher. If they say, “Who is he or she to tell my child what to do!” the child will not listen or respect the teacher anymore. When this happens, learning stops.

## ****Food is important****

The food that we give to our children also has a role to play. Too many sweets, fried food (like chips) and oily food increase restlessness in a child. Also, their food must be freshly cooked as far as possible and not packaged items kept in cold storage. Encourage them to enjoy fruits as much as chips; perhaps one chip-one fruit can be the deal! Where possible, it is advisable to avoid food products made from genetically modified grains and vegetables. The food has a direct impact on the mind and when consumed over a period of time, has a definite impact on the nature or attitude of the child.

Above all this, as parents, it is important to spend quality time doing ‘nothing’ with your child. Just sitting with them without looking at our mobile phones, giving complete attention to what they have to say, just being with them 100 per cent gives a great sense of security to the child. An insecure child is more likely to succumb to aggression than one who feels secure and attended to.

Teach children that the one who smiles come-what-may is stronger.

Show them when to stand up for what is right, and when to walk away from a fight.

As much as you can, protect their innocence.

As much as you can, give them pride in non-violence.