

Why is My Child Hurting Others?

Helping Children with an Intellectual Disability and Autism Manage their Aggression

AGGRESSION IN CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Children and young people with autism and an intellectual disability can have aggressive behaviour when they feel angry, frustrated or anxious.

Aggressive behaviour can be:

- verbal aggression, e.g., arguments, name-calling and teasing
- physical aggression, e.g., pushing, hitting, kicking, biting, hair pulling, scratching.



WHY DOES MY CHILD HURT OTHERS?

Children and young people with autism and an intellectual disability often don't have the skills needed to deal with big emotions like when they feel:

- frustrated – when other people can't understand them
- frustrated – when a task is too hard, or they want to stop the task
- frustrated or angry – when they want an item or to do an activity
- confused – when they can't understand other people or a social situation
- jealous – with peers, siblings
- anxious or stressed – e.g., when things change in their routine or they feel overwhelmed by sensations in their body (e.g., lights are too bright for their eyes or they hear a loud noise).

HOW CAN I HELP?

It's important to understand **why** your child is being aggressive. Find out as much as you can about the behaviour and keep notes about it so you can show a professional if you need help:

- What exactly does your child do?
- When does it happen?
- What is your child doing when they become distressed or hit out?
- What do the people around them do when your child does the behaviour?

e.g. if your child is anxious about an event and kicks out when you ask them to get out of the car, they might be telling you 'I'm scared', 'I need a break' or 'I need some re-assurance'.

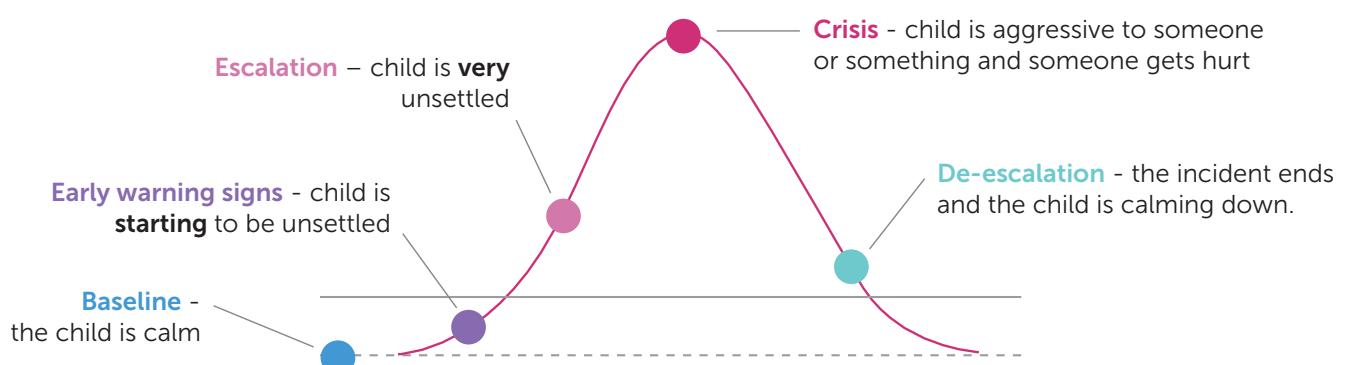
The Escalation Cycle helps us to understand what is happening for a child when they feel big emotions and what to do to help them.

e.g. if you see your child is starting to feel frustrated - get them to do a different activity, take some deeps breaths together, or have a movement break outside.



The Escalation Cycle is like a volcano of emotion. A child's emotions can **build up slowly** when they start to feel upset, or they can have a **quick eruption of emotions** when they feel frustrated, angry or anxious very quickly.

THE ESCALATION CYCLE



TIPS TO STOP AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR STARTING

- Make sure the child knows what is happening each day.
 - Use structured schedules and routines and use visual supports to help your child understand.
 - Include time to relax, and time alone.
- Help your child to identify and show their emotions in an appropriate way.
- Practice activities to help your child to be calm e.g. breathing exercises.
- Don't let your child watch violent content on screens: children might copy inappropriate behaviour they have watched.
- Reduce sensory experiences – make a calm space, turn off music, turn down lights, avoid crowded places.

TIPS TO CALM YOUR CHILD WHEN THEY ARE UNSETTLED

- Try a **different activity** they will enjoy or a movement activity, e.g., walking.
- **Offer two choices e.g., two different activities or items.** Choices can help a child feel more in control.
- **Stay calm.** This will help your child to calm down.
- **Use less words when talking to your child-** when a child is stressed it is hard for them to understand what others are saying.
- **Use gestures while you speak to help your child understand,** e.g pointing to another activity.
- **Do calming activities with your child,** e.g., deep breathing, take a break, squeeze a cushion or stress ball, water the garden.

WHEN YOUR CHILD IS TRYING TO HURT OTHERS

- **Keep your child and others safe:**
 - Move the child to a quiet, safe place to calm down. If you cannot move the child, ask others to move away.
 - Stay near your child, in a safe place.
- **Stay calm** – don't talk much- tell your child that you are here to help them.
- **Get help from another adult** if you feel unsafe or you can't stay calm.

WHEN YOUR CHILD IS CALMING DOWN

- **Praise your child** when they are trying to calm down.
- Encourage your child to do an activity **in a quiet, gentle way.**
- **When your child is completely calm** and is back to their usual routine activities, you can talk to your child calmly about what happened.



WHERE TO GET HELP

If you are worried about your child's aggression, you can get help from:

- your child's teaching team at school.
- a Behaviour Support Practitioner or Psychologist. They can help to work out why your child has aggressive behaviour and an action plan to help your child.
- a Speech Pathologist. They can help your child understand others and other people to understand your child.
- an Occupational Therapist who can show you and your child calming activities.
- your Doctor, Paediatrician or Paediatric Psychiatrist may suggest medication to reduce aggressive behaviour for a short time.

If you have any feedback on this tip sheet please fill in our [feedback form](#). You can find readings, resources and links related to this topic on our [webpage](#).

If you are still concerned, contact your GP or Paediatrician about services that might be helpful.

