

SUPPORTIVE MINDS

PARENT GUIDE • SAFETY & REPLACEMENT SKILLS

Hitting & Aggression Behavior Blueprint™

Protect safety. Understand the message. Teach a safer way.

MAKING THE IMPOSSIBLE POSSIBLE™

Guided by understanding. Driven by purpose. United by possibility.

Understanding is not excusing

Aggression is not an acceptable way to hurt, control, or avoid responsibility. It is also often a signal that something inside the child is overwhelmed, hurting, missing a skill, or expecting the behavior to work. Understanding the cause helps us change the pattern.

“IT’S OKAY TO BE ANGRY. IT IS NOT OKAY TO HIT. I WILL HELP YOU STAY SAFE.”

UNDERSTAND

Ask what happened before, what the body was communicating, which skill was unavailable, and what changed after the aggression.

HOLD THE BOUNDARY

Protect everyone. Keep language brief and respectful. Understanding the cause never means allowing someone to be hurt.

The goal: Understand aggression so the child can overcome it, build self-regulation, communicate needs safely, repair harm, and accept appropriate responsibility.

Step 1: find what is driving the aggression

Hitting is the visible action. The effective plan begins with what happened before it, what the child's body was communicating, and what changed afterward.

PAIN OR DISCOMFORT

Headache, GI distress, illness, hunger, fatigue, injury, medication effects, or another body need.

SENSORY OR EMOTIONAL OVERLOAD

Noise, light, touch, crowds, accumulated stress, fear, shame, or demands beyond current capacity.

COMMUNICATION BARRIER

The child cannot reliably say or show stop, help, break, space, no, finished, or something hurts.

IMPULSE-CONTROL DIFFICULTY

The body acts before the thinking brain can pause, predict, or choose a safer response.

ESCAPE OR ACCESS

Hitting has delayed a task, ended an interaction, gained an item, or changed an adult response before.

TRAUMA OR PERCEIVED THREAT

The nervous system detects danger even when other people do not see the situation as dangerous.

Choose the matching response

OVERLOAD-DRIVEN AGGRESSION

Capacity is disappearing. The child may lose language, awareness of the original goal, flexibility, and familiar skills.

Use: Safety, fewer demands, less language, co-regulation, time, and recovery. Follow the Meltdown C.O.R.E. Path™.

GOAL-DIRECTED OR LEARNED AGGRESSION

The child may still track the item, task, boundary, or adult reaction. The behavior may have changed an outcome before.

Use: Safety, a calm boundary, no reward for aggression, and a prompt for the replacement skill.

A mixed pattern is possible. Goal-directed behavior can escalate until capacity is lost. When language, choices, and familiar skills disappear, switch from teaching the boundary to safety and co-regulation.

REGULATE FIRST. TEACH SECOND. REPAIR AFTER RECOVERY.

Step 2: map the 0-60 Journey™

	Body tension, restlessness, withdrawal, faster movement, or a change in voice
	Repeating, protesting, seeking control, crowding, or asking to leave
	Louder voice, pacing, pushing objects, clenched jaw, fists, or rigid thinking
	Threats, swatting, kicking near others, throwing, or rapid escalation
	Attempts to hit, bite, kick, scratch, or use objects unsafely
	Active aggression, panic, or loss of access to language and familiar skills

The child's 10-20 signals:

The child's 30-40 signals:

The child's 50-60 signals:

Steps 3-6: Safety-First Response Blueprint™

03 • Protect

Move other people and unsafe objects away.
Create distance. Block or move away using only the least force needed for immediate safety.

Say: "I will not let you hurt me. I'm moving back."

04 • Reduce

Eliminate before you educate: reduce noise, visual stimulation, extra people, demands, questions, and excessive language.

Do: Give one short safety direction, then pause.

05 • Match the plan

If capacity is gone, co-regulate and wait. If the child can process, hold the boundary and prompt one familiar safer response.

Ask: Overload, pain, missing skill, or learned outcome?

06 • Recover before repair

Wait until the nervous system has recovered before discussing impact, repairing harm, practicing, or applying a related consequence.

Remember: Regulate first. Teach second.

WHAT OFTEN MAKES IT WORSE

Yelling, shaming, threatening, lecturing, demanding an immediate apology, repeatedly asking "why," crowding, chasing, forcing eye contact, rewarding aggression with the desired outcome, or assuming every incident has the same cause.

Step 7: teach what to do instead

A replacement skill must meet the same need as the aggression, be easier to use in the moment, and be practiced while the child is calm.

ASK FOR SPACE Teach “space,” “back up,” or a visual card before the body moves toward hitting.	ASK FOR A BREAK Use words, gesture, or a break card with a clear return plan when appropriate.
SIGNAL HELP OR PAIN Teach “help,” “hurt,” a body map, or a simple way to show where something feels wrong.	USE SAFE RESISTANCE Push a wall, squeeze a pillow, carry something heavy, or use another individualized sensory support.
COMMUNICATE STOP Practice “stop,” “no,” “finished,” or a hand signal that adults consistently respect.	MOVE TO SAFETY Teach the child to step back, find the calm space, or seek a trusted adult before reaching 50-60.

The skill we will teach first:

How the child will communicate it:

Step 8: prevention and repair plan

TRACK

Record what happened before, body signals, the aggression, adult responses, and what happened afterward.

CHECK THE BODY

Consider pain, sleep, food, medication, illness, sensory needs, and other health changes.

PRACTICE

Rehearse one replacement skill in the real setting while the child is calm and supported.

COORDINATE

Use a shared safety plan so caregivers respond predictably and reinforce the same skills.

Most common trigger or condition:

Early support we will add:

Adult safety response and exact words:

Repair after recovery (check in, restore, practice, reconnect):

Individual safety plan

People, places, objects, or situations that increase risk:

How we will create distance and protect others:

What the child finds calming or organizing:

When we will call another trusted adult or professional:

Emergency threshold and local emergency contacts:

Safety note: If there is immediate danger, serious injury, weapon access, repeated head injury, strangulation, or aggression you cannot safely manage, seek appropriate emergency or professional support. This educational guide does not replace individualized medical or mental-health care.

Need an individualized safety plan? Schedule at calendly.com/optimizemylife/newclientintake or email mary@supportiveminds.us.

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