

Does this sound familiar? Your children are playing in the living room while you clean up the kitchen. You answer the phone, and a few minutes later, one child is angry and screaming because someone took their toy and the other is in tears because their sibling hit them. In escalated moments like these, parents often find themselves trying to explain the rules or give long explanations. Unfortunately, when emotions run high, your child is usually not hearing your words. This is not a teachable moment.



There are countless teachable moments daily when skills can be practiced and emotions discussed: play time, in the car, at bath time or while reading together. Adults can reduce behaviours such as hitting, biting, pushing and whining when you

- 1) help your child regulate and calm their body when they are upset and
- 2) wait until an appropriate teachable moment to actually explain to your child what you want them to do.

Think again about the scenario when you are on the phone and your children are fighting. Below are several examples of how you could use teachable moments throughout the day to reduce the chance that the challenging behaviour occurs in the first place.

- **Teachable Moment #1** – During story time, read the book *Hands Are Not for Hitting* by Martine Agassi. For additional activities to do with this book, go to <http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/strategies.html#booknook>.
- **Teachable Moment #2** – During breakfast, intentionally notice your child sharing by saying, “Thank you for sharing the syrup with your sister!”
- **Teachable Moment #3** – Notice and name when your children are playing well together. Sit with them, make eye contact and say, “Wow, you two have been sharing Lego for 10 minutes! Tell me about what you are building.” This reinforces the desired behaviour of sharing.
- **Teachable Moment #4** – At the beginning of a phone call, pause and let your children know, “I am going to be on the phone for 10 minutes. When this timer is done, come tap me on my leg and show me the timer.”

Suggestions for Families

Find teachable moments throughout the day!

- **Play Time:** “Oh, no! I see that your bunny is sad. His brother is trying to take his toy. I wonder what he can do?”
- **Bath Time:** “The water stays in the tub. You can pour water into a cup or you can pour water on your body.”
- **Car Time:** “I saw that your friend Bella was sad at school today and you made her a picture. I bet that made her feel better. What a great friend you are!”
- **Story Time:** “Wow, that little girl in this book is really angry! I saw that she asked her mom for a hug. That is a great way to feel better. I wonder what you can do when you feel angry?”
- **Meal Time:** “Let’s practice asking for more milk.” Role play with whining, yelling or just banging your cup. Then model the expected behaviour. “You can ask nicely, “Mommy, milk please.” When your child does this, acknowledge their request: “I’d be glad to get you milk!”

Suggestions for Educators

Educators help children practice solving social problems in appropriate ways before they happen. Educators use role playing, puppets and group time to discuss emotions and possible solutions. Educators provide opportunities to practice throughout the day. For example, children may practice how to trade a toy at circle time with a puppet. Later educators will notice a child when they see them trade during play time. “Wow! You remembered that when a friend is using a toy, you can ask them to trade!” Learning and practicing skills in advance gives children the confidence to successfully manage a situation and allows caregivers the opportunity to affirm a child for making a wise choice.

The Bottom Line

Young children are learning in every moment. They are actively discovering the world around them. You are always supporting your child’s learning. Strolling in the park, reading books and giving them a kiss before bed all help your child learn about their world. You can use the many calm and happy moments in your day to intentionally model and practice expectations, rules and skills that will help your child.

