

april @ symbio

upcoming presentations

Emotionally Intelligent Discipline

In order for discipline to be truly effective, it has to help a child learn how to regulate and appropriately express emotions as well as control behavior. Because the goal of discipline is for a child to internalize a sense of appropriate vs. inappropriate behavior and ultimately moral action, discipline has to be relationally relevant. We will discuss effective ways to set limits, deliver emotionally supportive guidance and foster the development of a healthy sense of self in your child in the toddler and preschool years.

two dates:

Tuesday 20 April

7:00-9:00pm

@ [Peekadoodle Kidsclub](#)

Ghiradelli Square
900 North Point Street, F100
San Francisco CA

RSVP: info@thepkc.com

Peekadoodle members:
\$40/person or \$60/couple
non-members:
\$45/person or \$65/couple

Tuesday 25 May

7:00-9:00pm

@ [GetzWell Pediatrics](#)

1701 Church Street
San Francisco CA

RSVP: reception@getzwell.com

GetzWell members:
\$20/person or \$30/couple
non-members:
\$40/person or \$60/couple



q&a

I've got the sweetest, most social 18 month-old who is showing great promise as a football player. He loves all of his friends in his playgroup and is excited to play with anyone at the playground, but has a habit of tackling kids as a form of greeting. He doesn't do this aggressively - although tell that to the mother of the child who is on the ground crying after one of his hugs - but it seems from sheer excitement. To make matters worse, my son sometimes laughs when other kids cry. I can't understand what's going on in his head; he's not a mean kid. I've tried to explain that these things hurt people but it hasn't changed anything. I don't want him to learn to be aggressive, because aside from these two habits he's a really sweet kid, but I'm stumped as to how to stop him and I am afraid he's developing bad habits.

I've got the sweetest, most social 18 month-old who is showing great promise as a football player. He loves all of his friends in his playgroup and is excited to play with anyone at the playground, but has a habit of tackling kids as a form of greeting. He doesn't do this aggressively - although tell that to the mother of the child who is on the ground crying after one of his hugs - but it seems from sheer excitement. To make matters worse, my son sometimes laughs when other kids cry. I can't understand what's going on in his head: he's not a mean kid. I've tried to explain that these things hurt people but it hasn't changed anything. I don't want him to learn to be aggressive, because aside from these two habits he's a really sweet kid, but I'm stumped as to how to stop him and I am afraid he's developing bad habits.

Although your little linebacker-to-be may be hard to control, the fact that his behavior is persistent does not doom him to a habit of aggression. At eighteen months, his impulse control is virtually non-existent. For your son and his peer group to feel an impulse and fulfill it is an expression of emotional engagement and a declaration of personhood. This is, of course, a wonderful experience; it is pure, guilt-free narcissistic gratification. Everything that increases the experience of an impulse having been fulfilled will amplify that experience, which is why a toddler will often look pleased when a peer is left crying after an attack (whether the attack was prompted by frustration or enthusiasm) or when a parent responds negatively. This makes sense developmentally; creating that sense of independent personhood is one of your son's primary tasks right now.

Developing impulse control is another important task. Impulse control requires the cognitive ability to make a decision based on what will happen in the future. It also requires an expenditure of mental and emotional energy. Even once children have the cognitive capacity to understand that their impulses will not lead to a good end, the operation of summoning that awareness, and imbuing it with sufficient emotional energy to allow it to compete with the impulse, is not always successful. As adults we still fail at this at times: think of the last time you made an ill-advised remark in anger, ate something you knew would make you feel bad, or pushed the snooze button when you knew it probably make you late. Even if your son is highly verbal and understands you well, you will not be able to come up with an effective explanation for why he should check his impulses because, no matter how sensible you can make your message, it will not give him the emotional control he needs to resist jumping on an invitingly unsteady peer when he see her at the park. The development of impulse control occurs slowly and, by definition, requires repetition. Your son needs the emotional experience of having an impulse, being arrested and redirected before he can fulfill it or being rebuked for fulfilling it, in order to develop the internal structure necessary to balance the delight of impulse with the ability to modulate it. The course of this developmental process has much to do with a child's temperament. The more emotionally intense a child is, the stronger his impulses will feel to him; this increases the amount of repetition required to establish control that is equal to the strength of the impulse. The more physical a child is, the bigger his impulses will seem to the world around him; this often increase the arduousness of the process for parents.

It may help you to know that every time you must face the mother of a child your son has leveled or attempted to accost, you are logging another opportunity to help your son move one step further along in the process of learning to stop himself. To capitalize on these opportunities you will have to intervene every time your son attempts a tackle. He will learn that he must not tackle because you stop him from doing so successfully. How you stop him will depend on where he is in the process. Until you know he is anticipating being stopped, you will need to physically intervene whenever you can. If you don't get there in time, tell him firmly, "No, tackling is not okay." Remember, you are not reasoning with him, you are providing information. If he laughs at your rebuke, keep in mind that it is momentarily adding to the feedback loop that tells him he's made an impact, and that feedback is satisfying. Your rebuke will also make him anxious. So deal with the laughter by just holding him still and quiet for a few seconds as that rush of emotions subsides and then gently but firmly reinforce the message, "No, tackling." After some time you will notice him anticipating your intervention and you will be able to reinforce your message verbally: "Yes, you want to jump on him, but no tackling." At this stage, children will sometimes stop and sometimes proceed. When he does proceed despite your warning remember that you are still in the process of building a pattern. The more consistent you are in your response, the faster and less emotionally taxing the process will be for you both. If he is sometimes stopped from tackling but often succeeds he is establishing a tackling pattern. If he rarely succeeds and gets clear feedback when he does, he is establishing a pattern of not tackling even when he feels like doing so.

At this point, you may ask: but what about his developmental need to increase his sense of self by fulfilling his impulses? Am I thwarting him if I am always stopping him from doing that? The resolution to this concern lies in the many, many impulses he will have that you will respond to with encouragement and delight. It is important to remember that he has an array of needs and tasks to attend to during toddlerhood. At times they will conflict with one another, as when the need to establish his independent self clashes with the need to develop impulse control. Your parental feedback is essential to him in these times; you will be the signal light telling him when to stop and when to go as he learns to navigate these early years of personhood.

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support for families with young children

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