

Why do people hit?  
Sometimes they feel . . .

sad

Peter never plays with me.



scared

Here comes that kid  
who teases me . . .



jealous

I want that toy!



angry

I don't like it when my  
sister takes my things!





## A Word to Grown-Ups

### Children and Violence

Violence is deeply imbedded in our culture. All of us, children and adults, see violence on television, in movies, and in video games. We hear it in music, observe it happening, and may experience it firsthand. Sadly, many children experience physical or sexual abuse at the hands of adults.

Experts tell us that adults who abuse often believe they're entitled to have power over others. Feeling powerless in some aspects of their lives, they learn to use violence as a way to gain control. These beliefs and feelings begin during childhood. Thus, in teaching children about why people hit, the issue of power is an important one. As adults, we can help children feel empowered to make positive choices about how they'll treat others.

*Hands Are Not for Hitting* is a tool you can use to help children start to understand that they do have the power to choose not to hurt people. The book offers a way to help children feel empathy toward others, to solve problems, to control negative impulses, and to cope in constructive ways with intense feelings like anger and jealousy.

You can support this message as you read and talk about the book. You can guide children in other ways, too: form warm, caring relationships with them; set limits that are clear and consistent; provide consequences that are helpful and constructive; and model and express your belief that there are alternatives to violence, that violence rarely solves problems and usually creates new ones, and that violence is not entertaining or fun. Simply put, that hitting people is *never* okay.

### Discussion Starters and Activities

**Hello Hands.** Talk about all the ways people use their hands to say hello: with a wave, a salute, or a peace sign; in sign language; or by shaking hands or cupping both



hands around a person's hands. Try the different types of greetings. Come up with your own special greeting, such as latching pinkie fingers or grasping arms.

**Friendly Hands.** Talk about ways people can be friendly with their hands—playing pat-a-cake, playing circle games, holding hands to dance.

**Communication Explanation.** Explain the word *communicate*: to use words and actions (such as writing or drawing) to tell someone something. Explain that we also communicate feelings through our faces, bodies, and tones of voices.

**Talking Hands.** Talk about different ways we use hands to talk. Then do activities that let you communicate in a variety of ways: Use crayons, markers, watercolors, or finger paints to write your names. Use charades, picture drawings, or sign language to communicate actions such as eating, sleeping, or building. (For reference books on sign language, see "Learn More About It," page 35.) Use your hands, along with faces and bodies, to show different feelings.

**NOTE:** Be sensitive to cultural differences regarding hand signals. For example, to many Americans, a thumbs-up means things are going well; to some, the same signal may be seen as an obscene gesture.

**Talking About Hitting.** Discuss the ways hitting hurts: It hurts people's bodies and feelings. It hurts both the person being hit and the person who does the hitting. Talk about why people sometimes want to hit—because they may feel angry or upset about someone or something.

**Feeling Faces.** Together, think of as many words for feelings as you can. Have children draw or make a face to correspond to each feeling.

**Feelings Chart.** Make a chart children or family members can use to show how they're feeling. On self-stick notes, draw simple faces showing different feelings. Write children's or family members' names across the top. Tell children they can use their hands to stick a note showing how they feel under their name on the chart.

**Handling Feelings.** Tell children that it's okay to have strong feelings like anger, jealousy, or fear. There are acceptable ways to show these feelings and to help them go away—ways that are safe and that don't hurt people's feelings. Discuss the ideas shown in the book and also encourage children to suggest other ways to deal with intense feelings.

**Hand Hunt.** Put objects in a box or bag, then close your eyes and use your hands to identify them.

**Fingerprint Fun.** Make fingerprint pictures using a washable inkpad and paper. Notice how each fingerprint is different from the rest. Turn your fingerprints into faces, raindrops, falling leaves, or stars.

**No Hands.** Put your hands behind your back for five minutes. See what it's like not to be able to use your hands as you talk, play, or work.

**Paired Hands.** Put one hand in your pocket and keep it there. Then try to create a clay creature or a block structure using only one hand. Or work in pairs, each person using one hand so that together you have two hands. Try a similar activity to play an instrument or paint a picture. Talk about how two people working together can create something fun and unique. What if the two people decided to fight instead of work together? There would be two angry people and no building, music, or painting. Take time to discuss the many ways people use their hands to play, learn, and work together.

**Solving Problems.** Ask: "Have you and a friend had a problem to solve? What happened?" Discuss or role-play situations where children might need to solve a problem. Come up with different ideas for solving it.

**Avoiding Fights.** Encourage children to think of different things to do in order to get away from fighting or other violence. Help children identify different adults who can help them.

**Staying Safe.** Talk about and then pantomime different ways to be safe.

**"No" Talk.** An important part of children's safety is knowing what to do when another child or an older person tries to get them to do something that doesn't feel right. Tell children that they can say "no" in a big voice, run away to a safe place, and tell an adult they trust about what happened.

