

PORTLAND

lifestyle & family

PARENTING / DECEMBER 1, 2015

Ask Ariel: Portland Slugger



Dear Ariel,

My 6-year-old son responds to all conflict physically. Whenever he is upset, he slugs his older brother on the arm. If he doesn't feel well, he slugs his older brother on the arm. If he gets an answer from me that he doesn't like, he storms around the room, preparing to slug someone on the arm. All this slugging isn't really meant to hurt anyone and his brother shrugs him off as a pest. I don't like it that he immediately hits when he gets angry or impatient. I don't know how to help him.

-Mom of a Slugger

<http://www.portlandfamily.com/posts/ask-ariel-portland-slugger/>

IN PRINT

READ THE PDF

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

PAST ISSUES

FIND PORTLAND FAMILY



Dear MOS,

Physicality in communication is fairly normal for a 6-year-old child. Your son seems to be losing his ability to verbally express his feelings when he is upset, sick or disappointed. It's great that you have noticed a pattern to his hitting and that his physical aggression really seems to be communication rather than intent to harm. These are good first steps to helping your son express himself in a healthy way instead of slugging his brother on the arm.

I would start by speaking with both of your sons during a calm moment, long before there has been a physical altercation. Ask your older son to describe what it feels like both physically and emotionally when his brother hits him. Help your younger son understand what it feels like to get hit and how it affects his relationship with his brother. Let him know that it is not okay to hit in your family. Explain that aggressive behavior is wrong. I have a sense that because your older son doesn't get very upset when he is hit, that there haven't been many consequences for this behavior. I would begin giving a consequence every time your son hits (like a time out—I call it a break). Be consistent and firm in your approach if you want this behavior to stop.

Immediately following a slug on the arm, make sure to attend to your older son first and make sure he is all right. Remove your younger son from the situation and give him as little attention as possible, you don't want to negatively reinforce the aggressive behavior. Ask him to calm himself down. If possible, try to speak with your younger child in a quiet, low voice. This will show your younger son that you are calm and in control of your emotions. Have a conversation about the behavior when he is calm and ready to talk; this might be as soon as an hour or as long as a day after the incident.

You may also want to teach your son to create some space between having a strong emotion and physically responding to the emotion. Counting to ten, taking five deep breaths, learning some basics of mindfulness all can help children create a tiny bit of space between big emotions and unhealthy reactions to those emotions.

SUBSCRIBE

ADVERTISE

FREE PRINT SUBSCRIPTION

If you would like to request a free print subscription of Portland Family Magazine, please complete the following form and we will follow up with you.

Your Name (required)

Your Email (required)

Address

Address 2

City

State

0 SHARES

Ariel Frager



Ariel Frager is a school counselor and has a private therapy practice that specializes in treating children, adolescents and families. She lives in Portland with her husband, son, dog and kitty cat.



Zip Code

SEND

Tags: ask ariel

YOU MIGHT ALSO LIKE



Ask Ariel: Kindergarten Disconnection

OCTOBER 10, 2016



Ask Ariel: Preschool Resistance is Futile

JUNE 1, 2016



Ask Ariel: The Neighborhood Babysitter

Ready to move your life and career forward?
Marylhurst can help.

[LEARN MORE](#)

MARYLHURST
UNIVERSITY

LET'S KEEP IN TOUCH!

Join our e-mail list to get inspiring updates about fun, sometimes wacky, local family-friendly events.

First Name