



WHEN KIDS PLAY TOO ROUGH



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Learning to play and interact with other children or adults is one of the most complex skills that children learn. Play teaches children about developing physical skills and co-ordination, developing

cognitive and thinking conception, solving problems and enhancing memory skills. It develops language skills through playing and interacting with other children and adults. It develops social skills including learning to

cooperate, negotiate, taking turns and playing by the rules. These are not only important for conversing and playing at home but will also develop these skills at school when making friends and learning in the classroom.

However, some children may tend to play roughly. This may be a general pattern of play which is disruptive to other siblings or family members most of the time, or it could be an irregular concern when they get frustrated or feel left out at school.

There are three main reasons why children may play too roughly.

- 1.** Difficulty with registering sensory information during play by not noticing or registering how heavy they are playing with toys or how firmly they are touching or bumping other children.
- 2.** Not fully understanding the cognitive or thinking demands of play. This might include not understanding the rules of play or finding it hard to problem solve in the middle of play.

CHILDREN CAN LEARN HOW TO PLAY, 'TOO LIGHT', 'JUST RIGHT' OR 'TOO ROUGH'

- 3.** Not understanding social rules including turn taking, recognising minute cues of facial expressions and reactions and knowing how to change their actions quickly enough in play.

Here are three strategies for teaching children how not to play too roughly.

- 1.** Help children to get a real physical sense, or a kinaesthetic experience of what it feels like to play OK or too roughly. To give them this experience, we need to take them through activities that show them what it feels like to be 'too light', 'just right' or 'too rough' in play.

This might look like:

- having an arm wrestle with your child, pretend wrestling with 'floppy or weak' arms and 'really strong' arms.
- colouring in 'really softly', 'too heavily' and 'just right'.
- holding a pencil 'too loosely', 'too tightly' and 'just right'.

We need to give children a sense 'in their body' of examples of what it looks and feels like to play too roughly.

- 2.** Use a visual such as a traffic light system to give your child feedback that they are playing too roughly.
 - Green would mean that they are playing well.
 - Yellow is the warning that play is getting a little rough and they need to be careful they don't get too rough.
 - Red is that play is too rough and

that they need to slow and calm down, take a break and perhaps do something else.

Print out a picture of a traffic light, put it on your fridge or somewhere handy to look at and start using statements like, 'your play is in the yellow warning zone, you need to play gentler', or 'your play is in the red zone you need to be less rough', or 'perhaps it's time to stop and take a break'.

3. Write a social story about playing well and not too rough. This can be short and simple such as: 'I love to play with my little brother. We have lots of fun. Sometimes I get too excited and can touch him too heavily which might hurt him. This is not the best. If I touch him too firmly, I might be touching too hard and mum might say I'm in the red zone. To play safely, I can take a break and come back later and play nicely in the green zone.' Add some photos of your children or clip art of kids playing to illustrate the story. Write or print it out and staple it into a book to read at bed time to reinforce the best way of playing and not playing too roughly.

At times, we may feel at our wits end when children are playing too roughly. However, using a combined approach, through their body (touch and kinaesthetic senses) and through their cognitive understanding (external visual tools e.g. traffic light or social picture stories), you can really help children to learn to play without being too rough.

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***Deb Hopper**, Occupational Therapist, author & workshop presenter. Deb is passionate about empowering parents and educators to understand the underlying reasons of why children struggle with behaviour, self-esteem and sensory processing difficulties. As a practicing, Occupational Therapist, she understands the daily struggles that children, parents and teachers face. Deb is the co-author of the CD Sensory Songs for Tots, and author of Reducing Meltdowns and Improving Concentration: The Just Right Kids Technique. Deb is available for clinic & phone/Skype consultations (02 6555 9877) & can be reached on her [website](#).*