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## Dear Barry,

**Jacob, my three year old hits other children** when we take him to the play area! Even if he's not playing with a toy, he'll grab it first if he sees that another child wants it and then he hits the other kid. We've told Jacob that he needs to share, and we've told him to use gentle touches, but he still hits. Does this mean he is more at the RAMBO end of masculinity? Would hitting him back help him to realize that hitting hurts and that he should stop it?

Sylvia, Prince George

## Rambo?

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## Dear Jane,

**It is developmentally typical** for your son to hit at this age, just as it is typical of boys at age 4 or 5 (and older!) to experience difficulty sitting in a restaurant. Jacob is at the *everything is mine* stage of development where children need to learn about ownership before they learn to share. If children play together at all it is usually side-by-side in parallel play and social interaction can often lead to conflict as kids fight over ownership of toys. Because Jacob isn't old enough to understand the concept of sharing and is developmentally experiencing a need to assert himself within his environment, he will act out his needs. Especially as boys his age typically have limited vocabulary, aggressive acts can be the only way boys can communicate strong feelings.

Jacob may lean toward the Rambo end of the masculinity continuum, warranting increased opportunities to get the wiggles out and be engaged in learning and social experiences but rather than label his developing masculinity I'd encourage you to view his behaviour as appropriate for his age and stage of development.

**Of course, this doesn't mean that you let him hit other kids.** So what do you do? How you structure the playtime environment is important. With shorter play periods, ensuring that he not tired or cranky when he meets with other children, remaining close by and observing his play, you will often be able to intervene before Jacob lashes out at another child. If you see him headed toward conflict you can distract him by engaging with him in his play and letting him take the lead. If he does hit someone or act out aggressively it is important to remain calm, not make big deal out of it, and remove him from the situation. Try again later as he needs opportunity to move through this stage and as his

## Boys hit at this age

## Structure playtime

## For now, structure, **prevention**, calm listening, and compassion are your best tools.

cognitive abilities mature he will develop more socially acceptable behaviour.

**Hitting Jacob as a learning strategy** is not helpful and will only compound the situation. Hitting children teaches them to fear you rather than trust you. It creates anger and resentment and models that violence is an acceptable solution to conflict – the opposite of what you want Jacob to learn.

An solid understanding of child development along with your calm response and loving guidance will gradually teach Jacob about turn-taking, sharing, and managing conflicts and emotions. For now, structure, prevention, calm listening, and compassion are your best tools.

**Hitting children teaches them to **fear** you rather than trust you.**

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Have you got a story that you'd like to contribute about parenting or teaching boys?

Or, perhaps you have a

***Dear Barry question?***

While I am not able to respond to all questions I will comment on 2 or 3 in the next newsletter.



Please email it to [boysmarts@mentoringboys.com](mailto:boysmarts@mentoringboys.com)