

Managing Throwing – guide for parents

Throwing things is a new and enjoyable skill for many children. It takes fine motor skills to open the fingers and let go of an object and considerable hand-eye coordination to actually throw it. No wonder children want to practice this exciting skill once they have mastered it! What happens next is endlessly educational too: Your child discovers that whatever she throws falls down – never up. If she throws a ball, it bounces; if she tosses food, it goes splat; and if she throws her dinner, her mother's reaction is very immediate and entertaining! Of course, it is maddening when spaghetti ends up all over the kitchen floor or a clean dummy lands on a dirty footpath. But rather than trying to stop the child throwing (often difficult), concentrate instead on limiting **what** she throws and **where** she throws it.

When she is strapped into her car seat, try attaching a few playthings within easy reach (using short strings that cannot get wrapped around her neck). She will quickly discover that in addition to throwing the objects, she can fish them back again.

At mealtime, try using a dish with plastic 'suckers' that fasten to the table. Keep in mind, though, that while these work well enough that a casual grab will not send her dish scuttling across the floor, they will not stop a small person who is amazed to find her dish 'stuck' and is determined to pry it off! But you can often avoid the worst of it by sitting down with her while she eats. That way, you are immediately there to gently but firmly tell her 'stop' when she makes a move to throw her lunch and to hold her plate down with your hand if necessary.

It may also help to serve tiny portions of finger foods directly in front of her and to delay dishing up more until she has eaten what is there. Keep in mind, too, that for some children throwing food is a sign that they have finished eating and are bored. Take the child's food-flinging as a sign that she has finished her meal, and lift her down from the table. If a bit of food does escape her hands, either by accident or on purpose, try to keep some perspective about it: After all, a dropped slice of bread or a pinch of grated cheese on the floor may be annoying, but they are not worth getting upset about.

When your child is playing, on the other hand, there are things you will want to stop her from throwing: sand from the sandbox, for instance, or bricks at the baby. But she will accept these limits more easily and learn to police herself more quickly if there are lots of things that she **is** allowed — and even encouraged — to throw. Balls are an obvious choice, and you may want to stock up on a few foam 'indoor balls.' But actual throwing games (like tossing beanbags in a basket or skipping stones on a pond) are even more fun, especially if you play with her. Similar to meal times, for a while close supervision will mean that when she throws something she can quickly be given an alternative item to throw or be directed to play with the toy in the way that it is intended. The message you need to convey is that throwing things is fine as long as she throws the **right** things in the **right** place at the **right** time.

If you say 'stop' then try using a symbol or a sign as well. You may only need to say 'stop' at the dinner table if there is a problem with throwing food. Otherwise it is often best to avoid saying 'stop/no'. This does not mean ignoring the behaviour but rather trying to redirect – in the ways described above.

Throwing can also be a sign that you need to teach the child the skills of playing with a particular toy. This can be helped by modelling how to play with the toy.