



# Biting

## Why Children Bite

**Teething:** Children begin teething around the ages of 4 to 7 months. Swelling gums can be tender and can cause a great deal of discomfort. Infants sometimes find relief from this discomfort by chewing on something. Sometimes the object they chomp on is a real person! Children this age do not truly understand the difference between chewing on a person or a toy.

**Hungry or Tired:** Sometimes children bite because they are hungry or tired. They may have no other way to tell you how they

are feeling.

**Frustrated or Angry:** If a child is feeling frustrated, crowded or angry, biting may be the only way he can tell you and the other children he needs space.

**Attention:** Biting brings attention, whether it is positive or negative. Biting another child will certainly bring the attention a child seeks.

**Exploration:** Children are natural explorers. They may bite just to see what happens.

**Stress:** A child's world can be

stressful, too. A lack of daily routine, interesting things to do, or adult interaction are stressful situations for children. Children also experience stressful events like death, divorce, or a move to a new home. Biting is one way to express feelings and relieve tension.

**Communication:** Children do not always have the words to tell us what they need or how they feel. If you want a toy or want a playmate to leave you alone or move out of your way, it is a quick way to get what you want.

## Biting Prevention

**Observe:** Observation is a key strategy to biting prevention. Keep a close eye on the children. Intervene when you see a child becoming angry or frustrated. If a biting incident has already occurred, think about the event that led up to the biting. (time of day, hungry or tired, too much or too little activity, frustrated, bored etc.)

**Schedule Changes:** It may be the child needs a mid-morning snack or to go down for a nap earlier. Maybe there needs to be more active or quiet times sched-

uled in the day.

**Alternatives for Teethers:** If a child is teething, offer a teething ring or cold washcloth.

**Changes to the Environment:** Make sure the children have enough space for physical activity. They need to play without feeling crowded. They also need places to sit quietly without interruption.

**Empower with Words:** Give children the words to express what they want or feel, instead of biting.

**Rotate Activities and Toys:** Offer different activities to keep children's interest. Too many toys may result in them having trouble staying with one activity. Consider putting some toys away for a while.

**Give Extra Attention:** Children love attention. Rather than giving attention after biting has occurred, give attention while the children are playing nicely together. This helps them understand that they don't need to bite to receive attention.



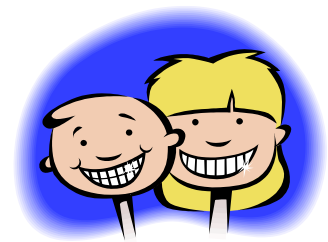
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## How to handle biting situations

- If your child starts biting, you will want to respond promptly. Immediately stoop or kneel down to the child's level and grip the child firmly by the shoulders. Look the child directly in the eye and say firmly, "NO, you cannot bite! Biting hurts! Then turn away. Focus your attention on the victim. This method works because it does not allow the child to enjoy a reward from biting and does not give enough attention to promote the use of biting to get your attention.
- Don't bite back. You will frighten or confuse the child and set a bad example.
- Help your child express himself with words. Acknowledge he is angry, disappointed, afraid, and so on. But that it is not okay to hurt someone. Help him figure out another way to lessen

**Take biting seriously. Biting causes physical pain and must be stopped!**

his anger.

- Ignoring a behavior works well for some annoyances that children use to get your attention, but biting causes physical pain and must be stopped.
  - Don't wait until later to correct the biting or expect someone else (your spouse, the child's caregiver) to handle the problem. Children have short memories and if you delay the response, the child will not be able to connect the biting to the correction. Besides, the child may continue biting in the meantime and get additional attention from others.
  - Don't humiliate or shame the child for biting. This only makes the child feel worse and does nothing to prevent the problem.
- Handle bad behavior in a firm but gentle way. Give praise, smiles, and hugs for good behavior.

## General Tips

- Establish rules. If you see forms of violence on TV or in other children, say "We don't act this way!" Repeat it often.
- Don't over react and lecture when kids are "bad." Young children will just tune out.
- Use the who, what, when, where, and how method to pinpoint the problem. When did the biting occur? Who was involved? Where did it happen? What happened before or after? How was the situation handled?
- Provide a meal or snack (without refined sugar) for children before they go into a social situation. Sometimes children bite or hurt others when they are hungry.
- Don't playfully bite a child's fingers or toes, or let a child nip at you. This can confuse a child, so don't start this behavior at all.
- Biting can be an uncomfortable issue for par-

ents. Parents of a child who is bitten are often outraged and angry. Parents of the biter may feel embarrassed and frustrated. Try to remember that a child who bites is not on a path to being a discipline problem. Biting is an act of a child who is not yet equipped to be fully social. Be patient. By age 3 most children will work to get along with others and win their approval.

- If the child is experiencing a stressful family or daycare situation, you will want to make everyday life as supportive and normal as possible. Predictable meals and bedtimes and extra time with a loving adult can help. Often, experiences like rolling, squishing, and pounding play dough or relaxing and splashing in the bathtub are great ways to relieve tension. In painful situations like divorce, it takes time and patience for healing to occur.



### Books for children

Teeth Are Not for Biting

By: Elizabeth Verdick

No Biting!, By: Karen Katz

No Fighting, No Biting!

By: Else Holmelund Minarik

### Sources

Child Care Resource & Referral, Moorhead, MN.

National Network for Child Care—[www.nncc.org](http://www.nncc.org)

Child Development Associates of San Diego—[www.edasandiego.com](http://www.edasandiego.com)