

Biting



Children who bite others cause a great deal of concern for the parents. The parents of the child who has been bitten are also usually very concerned about infection. Biting is an unacceptable behavior that needs to be stopped at an early age to prevent it from happening again.

Why young children bite

Biting is fairly common in young children, and it's often worrisome to adults. A family member, playmate, or classmate at daycare or preschool may be the one bitten. Biting can be painful and frightening when it happens. It upsets other children and often angers teachers and other adults.

There are many reasons for biting. Some are listed below.

Experimental biting

Experimental biting is done by babies and toddlers as they explore their world. They put everything in their mouths and sometimes bite in the process. You can help decrease biting by telling them, "No—biting hurts!" and being firm. Offer them things that they can safely bite on, such as teething rings.

Frustration biting

Frustration biting happens when young children become frustrated and unable to cope with a situation. Until they learn how to play cooperatively, they may respond to the demands of other children by hitting or biting. Some helpful guidelines for decreasing this type of biting include:

- Keep playtimes short and groups small.
- Supervise young children's play closely. Try to recognize frustration and intervene before the biting happens.
- If biting happens, say, "No, don't bite. Biting hurts." and remove your child from the situation right away. Stay with your child and help them to calm down. Explore other, better ways to handle the situation with your child, so they learn to handle emotions differently next time.

Powerless biting

Powerless biting happens when a child is in need of feeling powerful. Sometimes, the youngest child in the family uses biting to gain power. To help prevent this type of biting:

- Make sure your child feels protected and is not always being "picked on" by others.
- Explain the situation to bigger or older children and get their help to make things more equal.
- If biting happens, tell your child that they are not to bite and remove them from the situation right away. Stay with your child and help them to calm down. Explore other, better ways to handle the situation with your child, so they learn to handle emotions differently next time.

Stressful biting

Stressful biting is done when a child is under a lot of emotional stress. Biting may be a sign of distress or pain when the child is upset or angry. If this occurs:

- Try to find out what is bothering your child. Watch for what happens right before the biting happens.

Notice what kind of attention the child gets right after they bite someone.

- Help your child to find other ways to express their feelings. Let them know that biting is wrong and remove them from the situation right away.

If your child bites, respond firmly, but calmly, to the biting. Let your child know that you disapprove and remove them from the situation. Help your child learn new ways to handle things. If your child bites repeatedly, be sure to talk with your child's healthcare provider about the problem.

What do I do if my child is biting others?

While every child is different, the following are some recommendations that may be used to help with the child who bites:

- Be firm. Tell your child that you will not accept biting and why. Tell them biting hurts others.
- Offer another behavior the child may use instead of biting. If the child bites because they are angry, have the child come to you and tell you this instead. A child who is younger than 18 months may need a toy that is allowed to be chewed on.
- If you catch your child biting, use a firm "no" to stop the behavior, or try to stop the child before the biting actually happens.
- Use time-out if your child bites or take away a favorite toy or activity.
- Don't bite your child for biting someone else. This teaches your child that biting is still acceptable. Don't bite your child in a playful manner, because this might teach them to bite others.
- Give praise when your child does not bite.
- Don't force your child and the child who is bitten to play together.
- Don't give too much attention to the child who bites after the incident. This may actually reinforce the behavior.

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