

Biting



Biting is a common problem among young children under 3 and especially when there are lots of children together. It can happen for a variety of reasons and under different circumstances. Biting can be a difficult and uncomfortable issue for parents but understanding the reasons for your child's biting is the first step to changing their behaviour.

As a parent if your child is bitten you can feel angry or if your child is the biter, you can feel embarrassed and frustration. Most children only bite for a short period of time. It is important to deal with incidents immediately and calmly to ascertain the reason why they occurred and to look at ways to prevent future reoccurrences.



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Why children bite?..

Exploration:

Infants & toddlers learn by touching, smelling & tasting. Tasting or mouthing items is something children do. Before 3 children do not always understand the difference between chewing a toy and biting someone.

Teething:

Swollen gums can cause tenderness and discomfort. Infants sometimes find relief from this discomfort by chewing on something.

Independence:

Toddlers want to be independent. They want to be in control of situations and choices and biting can be a powerful way to control others.

Frustration:

When a child is unable to verbalise a message, they can become frustrated and to vent this children may then bite.

Attention:

Some children may bite to gain attention – even negative attention is still attention to a child.

Cause & Effect:

Some children may bite just to discover what happens when they do.

Imitation:

Pre-school children love to copy others so if they see a peer or sibling biting then they may copy. Even when a parent bites back to try & teach a lesson this signals 'its ok to bite' to the child.

Stress:

Sudden changes in daily routines can be stressful to a child and this can cause them to bite to express these feelings.

What can parents do...

The best way to start to break this form of behaviour is to talk to your child and help them understand their emotions and behaviour explaining that biting is not ok.

Intervene:

- Step in immediately & remain calm
- Remove the child from the situation
- Give them time to calm down
- Stay close by but not in their personal space

Attention:

Give lots of attention to the child/person that was bitten to avoid your child receiving the attention they were hoping to receive from their actions.

Ensure that you keep a consistent approach to biting and give consistent consequences. Also ensure you are given lots of praise when your child behaves well

Explain:

- Get down to the child's level & keep a steady firm voice, using clear words to explain why their behaviour is wrong
- Keep your responses short and name the specific misbehaviour so your child understands

Teach them:

- Once your child is calm ask them how they are feeling to determine what may have caused them to bite
- Explain to your child that biting someone is not acceptable behaviour
- Teach your child how to express themselves verbally so that they can do this rather than biting

Things to help...

Exploration or Teething

Provide child with a cloth or a teething ring to gnaw on.

Confrontation between children

Explain to the children that they need to learn to share or take turns. Offer alternative toys.

Expectations

Have age-appropriate expectations for your child's behaviour based on their current skills & abilities to avoid frustration.

Signals

Pay attention to the signals your child displays prior to biting so you can intervene earlier in future.

Textures

Offer foods with a variety of textures to meet your child's sensory needs

Hungry or tired

Look at your daily routine to ensure child is getting enough sleep & nourishment.

Attention

Children crave attention so try to spend time with your child doing positive activities to show them that positive attention is better than getting negative attention.

Routines

Ensure these are predictable and consistent for your child – children thrive when they know what to expect.

Reinforce & encourage

Consistently reinforce positive behaviour with your child and encourage them to use their words. By teaching them to communicate effectively will then help them express their feelings.