



The Basics of **Caring for Children** *In Your Home*

Biting

It's normal behavior for young children, up to about 3 years of age, to bite. It happens for different reasons with different children. The first step to stopping a biter is to think about why the child is biting.

Why Children Bite

Exploring — Young children learn by seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, and tasting. If you give an infant a toy, one of the first things she does is put it in her mouth. Young children do not always know that biting on a toy is not the same as biting a person.

Teething — When new teeth are coming in, a child's gums may be swollen and very tender. Chewing on something may help the pain. Chewing on a person may feel just as good on sore gums as chewing on a teething ring.

Cause and Effect — Around the age of 12 months, infants find out that when they do one thing, something else happens. When they push a button on a toy, something pops up. When they drop a spoon from the highchair, it bangs on the floor. They may also find that when they bite someone, that person screams!

Getting Attention — Older toddlers may bite other children to get attention. It could be to get attention from other children or adults, even if it's negative attention. Negative attention is saying "No" or punishing. Something is better than nothing! A child who feels alone

soon finds out that biting is a quick way to become the center of attention!

Copy Cats — Children love to do the same things they see others doing. When a child sees another child biting, she wants to try to do the same thing. This is why an adult should never bite a child back. Children who see adults biting others think it's OK for them to bite too.

It's Mine — Toddlers are too young to learn to share. They want everything in their control. Biting is a quick way to take over a toy or to move a child out of the way.

Learning Words — Toddlers are learning how to speak. They don't know a lot of words and they often forget what they need to say. If they can't find the words to say what they want, they may bite, hit, or push other children.

Times of Stress — Children who are bored, tired, or hungry may bite out of stress. Children going through hard family times, such as the divorce of parents, a new baby at home, or moving may be more stressed and start to bite others.



It's normal behavior for young children to bite.

What Can You Do?

Think about the times when a child bites. Ask yourself some questions.

- When did the biting take place?
- Who did the biting?
- Who was bitten?
- Where did it happen?
- What was happening before or after the biting?

Teach children to use words instead of biting.

Stop Biting Before It Happens

If you think a child is biting because she is exploring or teething, give her a cloth or teething ring to chew on.

If children seem to fight over the same toy shopping cart all the time, buy another shopping cart. That way two children can play with the same toy at the same time. Teach children to use their words to tell others what they want. "Tell John 'No' if he tries to take away your truck."

If a child seems to bite when she is tired or hungry, you may want to change your plans for the day. Maybe she needs a snack in the morning to hold her until lunch or you may need to shorten play time to get children ready for early naps.

If you think a child is biting to get attention or from stress, spend some extra time with that child. Try reading a book together, playing together, or rolling a ball back and forth to give this child some positive attention.

Stay very close to a child who has bitten others before. Be ready to step in to help if you think she may bite another child.

Praise Children

Tell children when they are behaving the way you want them to. This will help children know the kind of behavior you like. "John, I like the way you and Mary are building together." "Sue, thank you for asking Carrie before you took the doll."

Handling Biting

When a child bites, move her away from the other children. Use your voice and face to show her you do not like biting. Get down on the child's level and look into her eyes. Tell her, "No biting. Biting hurts. Lisa is crying. I won't let you bite Lisa or another child."

This is a good time to teach children to use their words. "You can tell Lisa with your words that you don't want her to take your toy. Say, 'Lisa, that's mine.'"

Ask the child who did the biting if she would like to help wash, bandage, and comfort the victim. Letting her be part of the comforting, teaches children the skills of kindness.

Talking with Parents

Talk with the parents of the child who is biting and the parents of the child who was bitten. Tell parents that biting is normal in young children, but not the kind of behavior you want. Talk about the reasons that children bite and what you are doing to help the child stop biting. Tell parents it is important that they handle biting at home in the same way so the child understands that she may not bite others at home or in day care.

Dealing with a biter can be a lot of work. Remember, you're helping this child learn to control her behavior.

**Stop toy fighting —
have two of the same
favorite toys.**



Developed by Lyn Horning, Better Kid Care Program

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