









Toddlers and Biting

Biting is considered a normal behavior that occurs during the toddler years. There are a number of reasons why toddlers may bite. For example, toddlers like to use their mouth to explore the environment around them and may use biting as a form of communication to show they are excited, frustrated, or bored.







A stressful event or new change — such as the birth of a new sibling, a move to a new house, or a lack of routine — can cause the child stress, which can lead to aggressive behaviors such as biting. Toddlers may also use biting as a self-defense strategy or may just be imitating other toddlers who bite. Typically, by the time a child reaches 3 years of age, this behavior is no longer utilized by the child.

Strategies to Help You Deal with Biting







-  **Try to figure out why your child may bite.**
Seeing a pattern can help you decide what to say and do to prevent a bite. For example:
 - *Do you think they are teething?*
Offer them a "chewy toy"; a cold, wet washcloth you keep in the freezer; or a bagel to chew on.
 - *Are they exploring cause and effect?*
Offer more toys and objects that allow them to "be the cause" (e.g., pots to bang with a wooden spoon, beads on a string, a pull toy).
 - *Do they bite if they get angry or frustrated?*
See session 3 of the Take Root 1-3 year program for strategies to keep their frustration low.
 - *Do they feel threatened?*
Some children withdraw, others may lash out and bite. Remind your child that you are there to take good care of them and keep them and their toys safe.
-  **Model how to deal with upset feelings.**
Stomp, make a face, take a deep breath, and say, "I am angry/frustrated!"
-  **Keep life predictable.**
Being able to count on what is going to happen next is comforting and helps a child feel in control. An example bedtime routine could be: play, bath, brush teeth, put on pajamas, read, three songs, a snuggle, and time for bed.
-  **Make soothing, relaxing activities a part of their day — and yours.**
Take a few minutes to review the Breathe to Thrive guide included on the Thrive website. It may give you some good ideas!
-  **Be ready to step in, if needed.**
Preventing a bite makes life easier for everyone.
-  **Pay extra attention when they are playing with a child they usually bicker with.**
Step in the moment you see tensions rising.



If Your Child Bites Another Child

-  Comfort the child who was bitten.
-  Explain to your child, "Biting hurts. Biting is not alright!"
-  Help your child calm down. It is scary to be so out of control that you bite.
-  Invite them to "check in" and help you take care of the child who was bitten. Talk about other ways to express their feelings — using words, stomping, growling, or running fast.
-  Never bite a child to show them how it feels, shame, hit, or yell at a child who bites. That will only teach them that biting, shaming, hitting, and yelling is OK because you do it.
-  Move on. Paying too much attention to biting can encourage a child to bite again.

If Your Child Bites or is Bitten at Child Care

-  Take a breath. Biting can stir up deep feelings for everyone, including your child who needs your support.
-  Arrange a time to sit and talk with your child's teachers about what happened. Talk about steps they are taking to prevent biting and about what you can do at home.
-  Avoid the blame game. It doesn't help anyone.
-  **If your child is the biter** – Decide if you will say something to the parents of the child who was bitten. If so, assure them you are doing everything you can to prevent it from happening again. But, before doing so, check with your child's teachers about whether or not the center has any policies about communication between parents in situations involving biting.
-  **If your child has been bitten** – Remember that in some programs the name of the child who bites is kept confidential. If you do know who the child is, try to put yourself in the place of the other parents before the conversation.
-  Remember, you and your child are on the same team.

Through a Young Child's Eyes

It's not always easy to be the parent of a toddler, but it can help to look at challenging behaviors through your child's eyes. If your child could tell you about when they bite, here is what they may say:



Biting is a behavior that seems to upset everyone — my parents, teachers, the child I bite — and it is upsetting and scary for me, too.

There are many reasons that I may bite. I may be teething, and my mouth hurts; I may be experimenting to see what happens; I may be frustrated or angry; or I may feel threatened. Identifying the reason can help you figure out how to help me stop biting.

Remember,
I am doing my best here.

Additional resources, skills, and strategies for parents are available at no cost through the online Thrive Initiative programming.

Visit the Thrive website
<https://thrive.psu.edu>,
and sign up today!