









Toddlers and Biting

Biting is considered a normal behavior that children may do during their childhood years, and there are a number of reasons why toddlers may bite. For example, a child may use his or her mouth to explore the environment or use biting as a form of communication to show he or she is 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 or change in routine, can cause a 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 old, this behavior is no longer utilized.

Strategies to Help You Deal with Biting







-  **Determine why your child may bite.**
Finding a behavior pattern could help you decide what to say and do to prevent the unwanted behavior—in this case, biting. For example:
 - *Do you think your child is teething?*
Offer him or her a "chewy toy"; a cold, wet washcloth you keep in the freezer; or a bagel to chew on.
 - *Is he or she exploring cause and effect?*
Offer more toys and objects that allow him or her to "be the cause" (e.g., pots to bang with a wooden spoon, beads on a string, a pull toy).
 - *Does he or she bite if he or she becomes angry or frustrated?*
See Session 3 of the Take Root: 1–3 Years program track for strategies to keep your child's frustration low.
 - *Does he or she feel threatened?*
Some children withdraw, while others may lash out and bite. Remind your child that you are nearby, and you will keep him or her and his or her 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 for a child and helps him or her feel in control. For example, a bedtime routine could be as follows: play after dinner, take a bath, brush teeth, put on pajamas, read a favorite book, sing three songs, snuggle with a kiss, and turn out the lights to go to sleep.
-  **Make soothing, relaxing activities a part of your child's 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 your child engages/plays with another child when there is a history of negative interactions.**
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 ok!"
-  Help your child calm down. It is scary to be so out of control.
-  Invite your child to "check in" and help you take care of the child who was bitten. Talk about other ways to express feelings, including using words, stomping, or growling.
-  Never bite a child to show him or her how it feels or shame, hit, or yell at a child who bites. These negative actions will only teach your child 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 that can be taken to prevent biting, and discuss what you can do at home to support the teacher and the child care center.
-  Avoid the blame game. This doesn't help anyone.
-  **If your child is the biter**, decide if you will speak to the parent(s) of the child who was bitten. If so, assure the parent(s) that you are taking actions to prevent this from happening again. However, before speaking with the other parent(s), check with your child's teacher about whether the center has any policies about communication between parents in situations involving biting.
-  **If your child has been bitten**, understand that, in some child care programs, the name of the child who bites is kept confidential. If you know who the child is, try to put yourself in the place of the other parent(s) before engaging in a conversation after the incident.
-  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 he or she bites, here is what he or she may say:



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

There are many reasons 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; I may feel threatened. Identifying the reason I am biting can help you figure out how to help me stop biting.

Remember,
I am trying to figure out this big world and my place in it.

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!