



## **BITING**

Toddlers (age 12-30 months) don't have the words to describe their emotions, they don't know how to control their feelings, and they don't have any concept of hurting another person. When a toddler bites, it is simply a way of trying to get their point across, experimentation with cause and effect, or playfulness gone wrong.

Although biting is normal for toddlers, children who bite over the age of 3 may indicate a delay in their social development or a more serious behavioral problem related to hostility and aggression. An evaluation by a health professional is recommended.

### **What not to do about biting**

Many parents respond emotionally when their toddler bites. This is because we view the act from an adult perspective. However, if we can understand that a toddler bite is most likely a responsive reflex, we can avoid responding in the following typical, yet unnecessary and ineffective ways.

Don't bite your child back to "show them how it feels." Children don't understand what they did was wrong, so by responding with the same action you may actually be reinforcing that this is an acceptable behavior, or confusing them entirely.

Don't assume that your child is willfully misbehaving. The ways that you'll treat these behaviors in an older child, who understands that biting is wrong, will be different than how you will approach this with a toddler.

Don't yell at your toddler. This will do nothing more than scare them; it won't teach them anything about what they've just done.

### **What to do about biting**

When you understand that your child's actions are normal, and that they aren't intentional misbehavior, you will be able to take the right steps to teach them how to communicate their anger and frustration. This takes time, and they'll need more than one lesson.

#### **Watch and intercept**

As you become familiar with your toddler's actions, you may be able to stop a bite even before it even occurs. If you see that your child is getting frustrated or angry, step in and redirect their attention to something else.

#### **Teach**

Immediately after your toddler bites another child, look them in the eye and tell them in simple short sentences what you want them to know such as, "Biting hurts. We don't bite." Next, you should have your child give the other child a hug and explain that this will make them feel better. Finally, tell your child what they should

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do next time, for instance, "If you want a toy, you can ask for it or come to Mommy for help."

Give more attention to the injured child

Soothing the child who was bitten can show your child that their actions caused another child fear or pain. You can even encourage your child to help sooth their friend.

Read books/Sing Songs

Read social stories or sing songs to your child to help them understand that biting is not acceptable behavior. Using books that say things such as, "We eat our lunch, not our friends", or sings songs about not biting teach your child how communicate their needs in a language they will understand.

First Aid for Bites

Although the risk of injury from a toddler's bite is small, it's good to know what to do in case of a bite that breaks through the skin:

Calm and reassure the child who was bitten.

Wash your hands with soap and water.

Wash the wound with mild soap and water.

Cover the injury with a bandage.

If the bite is actively bleeding, control the bleeding by applying direct pressure with a clean, dry cloth.

Call your pediatrician for advice.

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