



Biting Information for Parents

Remember that the behavior is not uncommon. Biting happens for a number of reasons. Babies and toddlers may bite experimentally (remember, they put everything in their mouths as a means to explore their world), or kids may bite when they feel frustrated, stressed, overstimulated, or powerless.

Act immediately, calmly, and consistently. Remove your child from the situation immediately. Stay calm and tell your child that biting is not OK and will never get your child what he/she wants. Be consistent in how you respond to each biting incident. Avoid dramatic negative responses that could cause more stress and frustration and lead to more biting.

Teach consequences. Each time your child bites, remind him that there are consequences. Tell them that whenever biting happens, you have to stop playing with toys and friends and go together to a different room to cool down. Talk about the idea that you may not be able to have play dates because it isn't safe or fun for other children to worry about being bitten.

Teach empathy and alternatives. Explain to your child that biting hurts the other child, both physically and emotionally. Ask your child whether it would hurt their feelings and their body to be bitten. Talk about alternative ways for them to express that they need something, such as using words or pointing or drawing a scene or acting out a play. And when your child uses these alternative behaviors, praise them to reinforce the behavior.

Comfort the victim. Don't forget about the child who was bitten. Once you have handled your child, go to the victim and ask they're OK. Take your child with you when you do this so they can see your empathetic behavior.

Evaluate other factors. Think about the factors surrounding biting incidents. If biting occurs when your child is playing with older kids, look into whether your child may feel powerless and picked on, talk to the older children about playing at a level that can include the youngest child. If your child bites due to stress or frustration, think about any recent changes to your routine and think about whether there are ways to smooth over the transitions. If your child always targets a specific child, closely supervise these play dates, or think about what is causing this relation between the two kids. For example, if there has been too much contact between the two children lately, take a break from the play dates.

Plan play dates accordingly. If you notice that your child bites when in larger groups, or when hungry, schedule accordingly. Limit play date length and size to prevent overstimulation, make sure there is snack, and keep an eye on your child if it looks like they are starting to melt down.

Be mindful of other parents. Don't be embarrassed. Tell your play date parents that your child is going through a biting phase and ask all parents to keep on the alert with you for meltdowns and bites. Tell them how you are handling biting behavior, and ask for their help in reinforcing the response.

Give them something to bite on. Whether your child is actually teething or not, as your child learns not to bite, offer an object (such as a teething toy) to bite on if they feel overcome by the need to do so.