



Coping with a biting child

Although biting is fairly common in young children-the majority of toddlers will bite at some point between their first and third birthdays- it can be worrisome to adults, upsetting to other children and often angers teachers and other adults. But while it is a normal part of most toddlers' development it is not an acceptable form of behaviour and with proper interventions, most toddlers will stop biting after a few days or weeks.

One of the worst things about having a 'biter' is the way the parents of the child who is bitten can make you feel. Unless their toddler also bites, they typically don't understand that biting is normal developmental behaviour, is rarely dangerous to their child, and that almost any toddler can turn into a biter. So try not to feel embarrassed or pay attention to the dirty looks you might get from the other parents and just focus on helping your own child stop biting.

The parents of the child who has been bitten are also usually very concerned about infection. You can reassure them that this will not be an issue if the skin is not broken-most 'bites' will simply result in a bruise. However, if the skin is broken then basic first aid can be applied (see end paragraph)

Why your toddler bites.

Biting usually falls into one of four categories:

- *Experimental biting*- Your toddler may just be teething and as they put everything else in their mouth then why not put someone's arm or finger in?
- *Frustration biting*- happens when young children become frustrated and unable to cope with a situation.
- *Powerless biting*- This occurs when a child is in need of feeling powerful. Sometimes, the youngest child in the family uses biting to gain power.
- *Stressful biting*-done when a child is under a lot of emotional stress. Biting may be a sign of distress or pain when the child is upset or angry.

Biting is basically a way for your toddler to express his frustration at a situation or to get your attention. Toddlers do not have the words to describe their feelings, do not know quite how to control their feelings and don't have any concept of hurting another person so for them biting is simply an immature way of trying to get a point across. Also, while other things he does may not always get your attention, biting usually does and to a young child negative attention is better than none at all. Some toddlers will use shoving, punching or grabbing instead of biting to achieve the same result.

Of course your toddler may simply enjoy the reaction he gets when he bites or may even just be hungry!

What to do (or not) if your toddler bites.

Many parents respond emotionally when their toddler uses his teeth on another human being; their immediate response is anger, followed by punishment. This is because we view the act from an adult perspective. However, if you can see it from your toddlers' viewpoint you can deal with it in a calm and effective way.

What *not* to do:

- *Don't* bite your child back to "show him how it feels." He isn't purposefully hurting his playmate so by responding with the same action you may actually be reinforcing that this is an acceptable behaviour, or confusing him entirely.
- *Don't* assume that your child is wilfully misbehaving. The ways that you'll treat these behaviours 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 her; it won't teach her anything about what she's just done.
- *Don't do play biting* - Nibbling your little one's toes or playfully nipping his fingers sends a mixed message to your child.

What *to* do:

- *Always remain calm.* Being in control of your emotions teaches self control in children and gives a sense of security
- *Give attention to the other child first*-therefore not reinforcing the bad behaviour of your own toddler
- *Try to intercept them*-as you learn your toddlers behaviour patterns you may be able to stop it before it occurs
- *Teach them*-after your toddler bites another child, tell her/him firmly but calmly 'NO, we don't bite!' Also administer an appropriate 'punishment' such as removal of a toy or 'time out'.
- Provide praise and positive attention when he is playing nicely
- Keep to a routine as much as possible and ensure your toddler get a good nights sleep
- Provide other methods of communication such as signing.

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 plaster (with parental permission).
- If it is actively bleeding, control by applying direct pressure with a clean, dry cloth.
- If bleeding continues or you are at all concerned then call your GP/NHS Direct for advice