

Biting in Child Care Settings

How often do caregivers and parents deal with children who bite at home or in the child care setting? Is it because of the caregiver, the parent, or is it the child? Caring for children in groups create many opportunities for children to bite, and biting is very common in child care settings. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (1996) estimates that 1 out of every 10 two year old toddlers engage in biting. Usually by age three most children have outgrown biting. However, some children with Language delays, slow Social/Emotional development, may still bite.

Infants tend to bite as this is a primitive way of communication and a way to explore. They do not connect with a sense of pain with biting. They learn and explore through their mouths, also a lack of self-control and impulsiveness can lead to biting. Usually biting occurs when infants are happy, over stimulated, or stressed.

Toddlers between 12-36 months bite when they are frustrated with learning language, social skills, and self-control. They are great experimenters, acting in the moment, infants do not plan ahead. Toddlers are still learning to communicate and biting is an effective tool to control others. Many ranges of emotions are displayed at this age from extreme happy to very sad.

Preschoolers, after 36 months old, rarely bite - but it still occasionally occurs for the same reason as it does for infants and toddlers. They bite to get attention, exert control, or bite out of frustration and anger. Sensory problems such as sensitivity to noise, different sounds, touches, and smells may cause these children to bite. Developmental screenings are useful in determining the factors to these reactions in children.

Why Do Children Bite?

Biting is a primitive form of communication and children use biting as a way to communicate. So, we can assess that biting is a communication problem and not a behavior problem until after the preschool age. Children that bite usually haven't developed the LANGUAGE SKILLS to express how they are feeling. Biting hurts and will create an immediate response from the victim and the caregiver. Language is how a child expresses how they are feeling emotionally in response to many things:

- I am overwhelmed by the sounds, sights, and smells in this environment
- You are not giving me the space I need
- I bite at home so, what will happen here (experimentation)
- I'm overtired
- I'm cutting teeth
- I need oral stimulation
- I want that toy and you won't give it to me
- Lack of routine in child care setting
- Environment is chaotic

Preventing Biting in the Child Care Setting

Direct Supervision can deter biting but, it only takes a second for biting to occur.

Take note of when the biting occurs, (a notebook may be used to document these times)

Is the same child being bitten?

Is it at times when the child is tired, bored, agitated, or over stimulated?

What time is the biting happening? What is going on in your environment when the biting occurs? Does the biting happen when you are busy changing a baby, cooking lunch, or preparing activities, etc.?

Is biting a problem for this child in other settings? Ask parents if they are experiencing this at home or in other places. If they are seeing this too, what are their strategies for dealing with this behavior?

Have a plan for how you will handle biting. Discuss biting with parents and provide a statement in your policies and procedures. Educate parents on biting in group settings.

Strategies for Handling Biting in the Child Care Setting

How Should You Handle Biting?

Focus on how you are feeling. Are you fearful of parent's reaction, angry, embarrassed, or frustrated? Do you have your own ideas on biting and how to handle it? Do you have biases or your own beliefs on biting? Explore your feelings before this occurs. State in your policies how you will handle biting in your child care home.

Remain calm.

Focus on the child that has been bitten. Do they need a cold compress? Are they bleeding? Practice Universal Precautions if appropriate, wash the wound, and offer First Aid. If age appropriate, help the biter assist in comforting the child that has been bitten, (the biter may or may not be emphatic to their action).

Do not belittle the child that bit, offer emotional and physical support and comfort to both children. Let them know that biting is not an acceptable behavior. Make statements such as: STOP, No Biting, Biting Hurts, We use words or signs to talk, not biting!

Help the child that has been bitten move on to another play activity. Offer suggestions to the biter on how they may get their needs met by using alternatives to biting such as: asking for adult help, if you feel scared or mad.

Help children say the words based on the situation, “I’m mad,” “I want that toy,” “I need space,” or “I don’t want to play now.” Children don’t yet have all of the language skills to express their emotions so, we need to guide them until they learn appropriate behaviors to do so.

Do not ever bite a child or ask a bitten child to bite back in retaliation or as punishment. Hitting, using soap, or using belittling language or behavior is totally inappropriate and is against licensing regulations.

Do not label children or make a child feel that he or she is a bad person because of biting. It is the behavior of biting that is not appropriate, not the child who bit.

Support Both the Biter and the Bitten Child Emotionally and Physically

Try to assess why the biting is occurring.

Where is the child emotionally and developmentally? Do you have a child who is older but, behind in Language Skills or Social Emotional Development? Remember, not all children reach developmental milestones at the same time. Each child is unique, some are slower or faster in specific areas of development. Just because a child is a certain age doesn’t necessarily mean they are developmentally on target in every area of their development.

Give the child verbal clues such as: “Can I play with that toy?” or “I don’t want you close to me right now,” help them say the words if they have language. They can also say “I’M MAD, SCARED, FRUSTRATED.”

Help children express their negative emotions in appropriate ways by tearing up paper, punching pillows, making animal faces such as lions, tigers, bears, drumming a drum or acting out physically ie. jumping, skipping, stomping their feet.

Reinforce positive behavior and acknowledge when the biter is displaying appropriate behavior. **Positive reinforcement goes a lot farther than negative enforcement.**

Praise your child when they express their feelings, whether they are positive or negative feelings.

Be sure to understand language development and what is socially, emotionally, and developmentally appropriate for the child you are caring for.

Provide adequate alone time and quiet spaces for children who are having a hard time emotionally. Provide a small space with stuffed animals, soft lighting, and pillows where children that are overwhelmed can go when they are experiencing emotional distress.

Give firm positive hugs to help calm emotionally distraught children.

Try to schedule activities when children’s basic needs (food, water, rest) are met first.

If a child is teething offer teething rings or cool washcloth to sooth discomfort. If your child needs oral stimulation offer healthy crunchy foods that are developmentally appropriate.

Schedule a meeting with the child's parents to make a plan to assist the child in their language, social, and emotional development.

If problems continue, an assessment by the child's pediatrician or Early Learning Professional may be recommended. All communities have a Child Find Specialist to address these concerns. Contact Early Intervention Colorado, eicolorado.org, or call 1-888-777-4041 for specific information in your community.

Supporting Parents with Biting

If you have a child that has been bitten in your setting, be sure to give an "ouch report" to the bitten child's parent and address the incident with the parent per your contract. It is not necessary to identify the biter, this is discouraged. Each incident will be individual to your care, and you will want to asses each incident at the time. Do not label the biter as a bad child and assure the parents of the victim and other parents that you are doing everything you can for their child and the biter. Stating facts in your contract or using biting handouts can help parents understand biting.

Discuss the incident with the parents of the child that has bitten. Does this occur elsewhere? How often? How does the parent address biting? Work with the parents to develop a plan of action to help support this child emotionally, socially, and to help develop language skills.

Help all parents understand that it is normal for toddlers to bite and that you are doing everything to assure their child is in a safe and nurturing environment.

Resources:

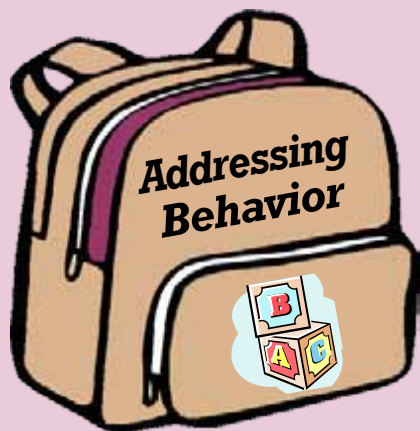
1. Teeth Are Not for Biting by Elizabeth Verdick
2. No Biting by Karen Katz
3. No Biting, Louise by Margie Palatini
4. www.challengingbehaviors.org
5. American Academy of Pediatrics (aap.org)
6. www.healthychildren.org
7. <http://families.naeyc.org>
8. www.ucsfchildcarehealth.org
9. <http://www.kidsource.com>
10. csefel.vanderbilt.edu/documents/biting-parenting_tool.pdf
11. <http://ecap.crc.illinois.edu>
12. Colorado Early Intervention www.eicolorado.org
13. Early Intervention Supports and Services for Infants, Toddlers and Their Families 1-888-777-4041

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Backpack Connection Series

About this Series

The *Backpack Connection Series* was created by TACSEI to provide a way for teachers and parents/caregivers to work together to help young children develop social emotional skills and reduce challenging behavior. Teachers may choose to send a handout home in each child's backpack when a new strategy or skill is introduced to the class. Each *Backpack Connection* handout provides information that helps parents stay informed about what their child is learning at school and specific ideas on how to use the strategy or skill at home.

The Pyramid Model



The Pyramid Model is a framework that provides programs with guidance on how to promote social emotional competence in all children and design

effective interventions that support young children who might have persistent challenging behavior. It also provides practices to ensure that children with social emotional delays receive intentional teaching. Programs that implement the Pyramid Model are eager to work together with families to meet every child's individualized learning and support needs. To learn more about the Pyramid Model, please visit challengingbehavior.org.

More Information

For more information about this topic or to see samples of challenging behavior, visit TACSEI's website and type "biting" in the Search Box located in the upper-right hand corner of the screen.



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How to Help Your Child Stop Biting

Brooke Brogle, Alyson Jiron & Jill Giacomin

It is very common for a child to bite others at some point during their early years. When children do not have the skills or vocabulary to express their feelings, they might engage in a behavior, such as biting, as a way to let you know how they feel. Children might bite for a variety of reasons:

- Frustration – she might bite because she wants her toy back or because her sister is sitting too close to her.
- Lack of play skills – she might bite because she feels overwhelmed by the proximity of other children or expectation to share toys.
- Attention – she might bite because biting causes a big reaction from adults. Biting can result in adults interacting with the child or gaining the adult's attention.
- Teething – she might bite to relieve pain from new teeth coming in.
- Overwhelming emotions – she might bite because she does not know how to express emotions when she is hungry, tired, scared or anxious.

The important thing for you to remember when biting occurs is to stay calm with your actions and words and first try to figure out the reason WHY the biting happened. For example, if your child bites you when your attention is focused on another person in the room, you might think your child bit you to get your attention. Once you understand the reasons why your child bites, you can teach her a new way to express her feelings or requests during situations when she is likely to bite. It takes time, patience and repeated practice, but once she has mastered the skills needed to appropriately express her feelings, biting and other challenging behaviors will decrease.



Try This at Home

- If your child is biting out of frustration, you can say, "You are so frustrated. You want that toy." Teach your child simple words such as "mine" or "no." Teach some basic sign language or gestures for things like "help" or "stop."
- If your child is biting because she lacks play skills, join her in play by sitting on the floor and coaching her. She might need guidance to learn and practice how to join play, take turns, share, communicate with other children, and get help if she needs it. For example, if another child tries to take her doll, you might say, "Molly thinks your doll looks fun. She wants to play too. Can we show Molly where the other dolls are?"
- If your child is biting to get attention, keep your reaction non-emotional, short, and as uninteresting

as possible to avoid teaching him that biting has a big effect on the adult. An adult's big reaction can be reinforcing for the child. Instead, teach your child appropriate ways that he can get attention, such as tapping you on the shoulder, and then reward him when that behavior occurs. For more information on how to teach this skill, refer to the Backpack Connection handout "How to Teach Your Child to Appropriately Get Your Attention".

- If your child is biting because he is teething, offer crunchy healthy foods such as crackers or pretzels throughout the day. Give him a teething ring or cloth to chew on. Chilled teethingers can also soothe sore gums.
- If he is biting at times when he feels overwhelmed by anger, frustration or disappointment, you can teach him about emotions and ways to deal with them in order to reduce, or eliminate, the biting behavior. You can use books about emotional literacy as teaching tools. You can also help him to identify and label his own emotions or others emotions as they are being experienced. For more information on teaching your child about emotions, refer to the Backpack Connection handout "How to Help Your Child Understand and Label Emotions".



Practice at School

When a child bites at school, teachers immediately help the child who has been hurt. By first attending to the hurt child, teachers are not giving attention to the child who bit. This lets the child who bit know that if she wants to get someone's attention, this way did not work. Teachers also include the child who bit in caring for the hurt child as much as possible. This may include letting her get an ice pack, carry a bandage, offer a hug, hold his hand or bring him a stuffed animal. By including her, she is seeing the result of her actions, learning how to solve problems and help friends. After the situation has calmed down, teachers might talk about what happened and offer ideas on what she can do the next time she feels like biting. Teachers might also put books in the library about biting to read.



The Bottom Line

Biting is a common behavior for very young children, but one that must be addressed immediately. Children might bite when they feel overwhelmed by an emotion and do not have the words or skills to tell someone or ask for help. Parents can watch and learn when their child is likely to bite (during play dates with friends, when left alone with a sibling, when teething, etc.) and then teach their child a new skill to replace the biting behavior.



www.challengingbehavior.org

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Play Right—Don't Bite!



Children who bite others hurt their peers and upset parents and teachers. Classmates may avoid the biters; adults may isolate them. So why do children bite? And how can we change this behavior?

Reasons children bite

- Infants probably bite as a way to explore objects, experiment, express excitement, or relieve teething pain.
- Toddlers are the most frequent biters. Toddlers may bite to express frustration before they have words to express their feelings. They also bite to get attention, to control a situation, or to imitate others who bite.
- Preschoolers bite as self-defense or to express anger or frustration. However, by the age of 3, most children can communicate their feelings and needs without biting. Frequent biting by a child over 3 may signal a serious behavior problem. Parents should discuss this behavior with the child's health care provider or a counselor.

Responses to biting

- Intervene immediately to stop the biting. Clearly state: "No biting! I don't want you to bite anyone because it hurts, and I don't want anyone to bite you, either." Focus attention on the victim, not the biter. Remove the biter from the situation while giving first aid and comfort to the victim.
- Give an infant a safe teething object.
- Teach a toddler or preschooler words to use to express feelings or needs: "Jasmine, tell Luis not to take your blocks. Ask me for help if you need it. Don't bite him!"
- Do not bite the child back. Model the behavior you want to see in a child. Keep the biter away from other children as long as he or she is upset or angry.

Actions to prevent future biting

- Avoid labeling children as biters. Watch for positive behavior and reward it with your attention. "Tyler, may I join you for a few minutes? It's fun to see what you're building."
- Make sure the child's routine allows for adequate rest, food, and drink.
- Avoid overcrowding toddlers and include structured as well as unstructured activities.
- Help a child deal with stress. Teachers and parents can work together to reassure a child whose family is experiencing a major change. Encourage her to express feelings in words, through art, or through physical activity, such as punching clay or a toy.

Communicating with parents

- Chart incidents of biting and inform the parents of each of the children involved. Confidentiality should be maintained so the identity of one child involved is not revealed to parents of another.
- Let parents know what steps teachers are taking to ensure the safety of all the children.
- Work with the parents of the child who bites to provide consistent responses to biting at home or at child care.
- Be sure all parents are aware of policies a child care provider has related to biting or other aggressive behavior.

 For related Web resources, see "Play Right—Don't Bite!" at <http://illinoisearlylearning.org/tips.htm>

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this tip sheet are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Illinois State Board of Education.



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How to Handle Biting

The toddler years are a time of growth, exploration and change for children. Often toddlers have trouble expressing their thoughts and feelings and may act out by biting others.

Why Do Toddlers Bite?

- **Physical and developmental changes.** Toddlers are teething, they love to explore and experiment (with their mouths), and they may bite to get a reaction.
- **Expressing Feelings.** Biting may be a way to express frustration, anger, excitement, anxiety or a need for attention.
- **Environment not the right fit for child.** Is there too much stimulation or not enough? Is the schedule too rigid or so loose that they don't know what their day will be like? Is the play area too crowded?

What To Do When Toddlers Bite:

- Quickly comfort the child who was bitten, then be clear and firm with the child who bit that biting is not OK.
- Give first aid if needed. If skin is broken, wash wound with soap and water; if child is likely to get dirt in wound, cover it. Offer an ice pack to reduce pain and swelling whether the skin is broken or not.

Handling Ongoing Biting Behavior:

- Try to find out why the biter is biting by observing where and when it happens.
- Talk with all caregivers to develop a plan to handle future biting. Make changes to the environment and or routine if you think it is encouraging the biting.

How to Prevent Biting:

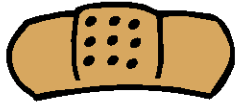
- Provide a positive and well-supervised environment: have duplicate toys, provide safe objects for teething, create different areas for smaller groups of children to play in.
- Provide a flexible yet consistent schedule.
- Provide a variety of sensory activities: painting, playdough, sand and water play, and interactive toys.
- Interact with children gently and thoughtfully.
- Have realistic expectations for children's behavior.

Adapted from *No Biting: Policy and Practice for Toddler Programs* by Gretchen Kinnell (2002). Copies available from the NH Childcare Resource and Referral Network: www.nhccrr.org or through the Family Resource Connection (NH State Library) at 1-800-298-4321, www.nh.gov/nhsl/frc

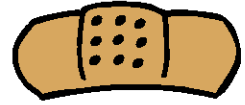
For more Fact Sheets please go to www.ParentHelpNH.org

Children's Hospital at Dartmouth, Injury Prevention Center, NH Department of Health and Human Services, NH Department of Education, NH Pediatric Society, SAFE KIDS NH & Partnership for a DrugFreeNH.org





ACCIDENT REPORT



| | |
|--|---|
| Child's Name: | |
| Date of Accident: | |
| Time of Accident: | |
| Nature of Injury: | |
| Location of Incident: | |
| What the child was doing: | |
| Caregiver response and first aid: | |
| Name of Caregiver that responded: | |
| Additional Information: | |
| Parent contacted? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Name of Parent contacted: | |
| Who contacted parent: | |
| How parent was contacted: | <input type="checkbox"/> Phone <input type="checkbox"/> Email <input type="checkbox"/> Other: |
| Time parent was contacted: | |
| Other Contacts or Actions: | |

Child Care Provider Signature

Date: _____



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