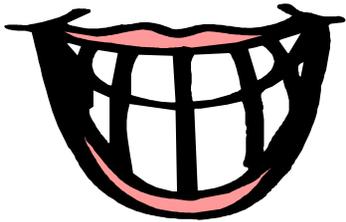


Understanding Children Biting

You've just discovered that you have a pint-sized biter on your hands. Isn't it amazing how those tiny teeth that once caused so much excitement and celebration can now cause so much fear and frustration?

Biting is actually quite common among young children. Children may bite for different reasons under different circumstances. Understanding the reason for your child's biting is the first step to changing his or her behavior.



Exploration Infants and toddlers learn by touching, smelling, hearing and tasting. If an infant is given a toy, one of the first places the infant puts it is in the mouth. Tasting or "mouthing" things is something that all children do. Children this age do not always understand the difference between gnawing in a toy and biting a person.

Teething Children generally begin teething between the ages of four and seven months. Swelling gums can be tender and can cause a great deal of discomfort. Infants sometimes find relief from this discomfort by chewing on something. Sometimes the object they chomp on is a real person! Again, children this age may not understand the difference between chewing on a person and biting a toy.

Cause and Effect At about age 12 months, infants become interested in finding out what happens when they do something. When they bang a spoon on the table, they discover it makes a loud sound. When they drop a toy from their crib, they discover that it falls. They also may discover that when they bite someone, they get a loud scream of protest!

Attention Older toddlers may bite to get attention. When children are in situations in which they do not receive enough positive attention and daily interaction, they often find a way to make others sit up and take notice. Being ignored is not fun. Biting is a quick way to become the center of attention, even if it is negative attention.

Imitation Older toddlers love to imitate others and find it a great way to learn new things. Sometimes children see others bite and decide to try it themselves. When an adult bites a child back in punishment, it generally does not stop the biting, but rather teaches the child that biting is an acceptable form of behavior.

Independence Toddlers are trying hard to be independent. "Mine" and "Me do it" are favorite phrases. Learning to do things without help, making choices, and needing control over a situation are part of growing up. Biting is a powerful way to control others. If a child wants a toy or wants a playmate to leave him alone or move out of his way, biting helps him get what he wants.

Frustration Young children often experience frustration. First, for example, growing up is a real struggle. Drinking from a cup is fine, but nursing or sucking from a bottle may seem wonderful. Sometimes it would be nice to remain a baby. Second, toddlers don't have good control over their bodies yet. A loving pat sometimes turns into a push or a whack. Finally, toddlers don't talk well yet; they have trouble asking for things or requesting help, and they haven't learned how to play well with others. When a child doesn't have words to express her feelings, sometimes she will express her feelings by hitting, pushing, or biting.

Stress A child's world can be stressful at times. Lacks of daily routine, interesting things to do, or adult interaction are stressful situations for children. Biting is one way to express feelings and relieve tension, since toddlers don't have the skills or understanding to negotiate or understand another person's point of view.

What can parents do?

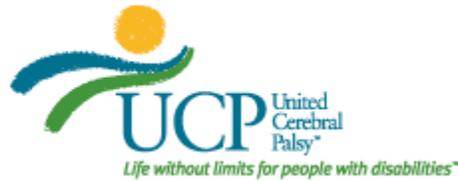
Use the who, what, when, where, and how method to discover what is really happening. When does the biting occur? Who is involved? Where does it happen? What happens before or afterwards? How was the situation handled?

Teach new behavior. When a child bites, use your voice and facial expressions to show that biting is unacceptable. Speak firmly and look directly into the child's eyes. For example, you might say, "Sara, it's not OK to bite. It hurts John when you bite him. He's crying. If you need to bite, you can bite this (cloth, toy, food, etc.), but I won't let you bite John or another child."

If the child is able to talk, you also might say, "You can tell John with your words that you need him to move instead of biting him. Say, "Move, John." You also may want the biter to help wash, bandage, and comfort the victim. Making the biter part of the comforting process is a good way to teach nurturing behavior.

Whenever the biter is out of control, you will need to restrain or isolate the child until he or she calms down. Insist on a "time out" or "cooling-off period." Wait a few minutes until the child is under control and then talk to the toddler about his or her behavior.

Biting is a difficult and uncomfortable issue to deal with for parents. Take heart! Most toddlers who bite do so only for a short while. Paying close attention to the reasons will help you come up with some useful solutions. Soon your toddler will have learned important new skills for communicating with others.



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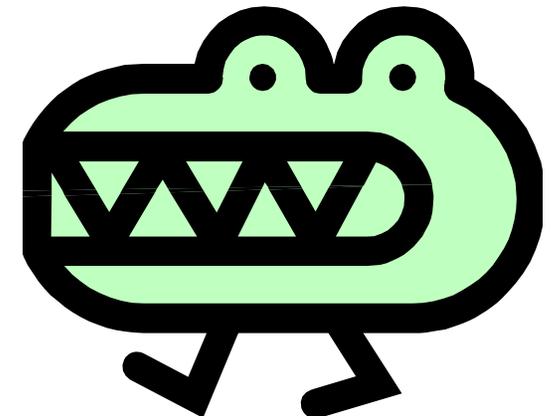
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