

# Biting

## Definition

- The bad habit of biting people
- One of the most unacceptable of aggressive behaviors

## Health Information

### Causes

- Children usually discover biting by chance when they are about 1 year old and teething. Many children first learn to bite others by biting their parents in a playful manner. The biting will continue if the parents initially think it is cute and turn it into a game.
- Later, children may bite when they are frustrated and want something from another child. For children with limited verbal skills, biting can become a primitive form of communication. After a child is 2 or 3 years old, biting can become a deliberate way to intimidate others and get their way.

### Adult Reactions to Biting

- Being attacked by a biter can be scary to a child.
- The parent of the child who has been bitten is usually very upset. They may be worried about bad infections.
- If biting happens in a child care setting, the other parents may want the biter to be expelled. If it happens in someone else's home, the child is often told never to return.
- Adults tend to forget that some biting behavior in a group of toddlers is to be expected.

### Prevention of Biting

- First, never give in to your child's demands because of biting.
- The best time to stop biting behavior from becoming a habit is when the biting first starts.
- Be sure that no one laughs when your child bites. Avoid any "love-bites" or nipping games. Reason: Your child will not understand how they are different from painful biting.
- Make sure that child care providers understand your approach and are willing to follow it.

## Care Advice

1. **Clarify the Rule: "No Biting":**
  - Give your child a simple reason for the rule: "Biting hurts. We do not hurt other people".
2. **Interrupt Biting with a Sharp "No":**
  - When your child bites someone, intervene immediately. Be sure to use an unfriendly voice and look your child straight in the eye. You need to have zero tolerance for biting.
  - Sometimes if he looks as if he is going to bite someone, interrupt before he actually does it. Do not wait until the victim is hurt or screaming.
  - This is one behavior where punishment for intent may be needed. Close supervision of your child will be necessary until you are sure biting is no longer a risk.
3. **Give a Time-Out When He Bites Someone:**
  - Send him to a boring place or corner. Require one minute per year of age in time-out.
  - If time-out does not work, take away a favorite toy or all video time for the rest of the day.
  - If he tries to bite you while you are holding him, say "No." Always put him down immediately and walk away (another form of time-out).

4. **Never Bite Your Child for Biting Someone Else:**
  - Biting back will make your child upset that you hurt him. It also teaches him that it is okay to bite if you are bigger.
  - Also do not wash your child's mouth out with soap.
  - Never pop his cheek or slap his mouth. It won't help and it might be reported as child abuse.
5. **Teach Your Child Acceptable Ways to Get What He Wants:**
  - Tell your child that if he wants something, he should come to you and ask for help. Teach your child to ask for what he wants rather than take it.
  - Teach him how to take turns. Teach him how to trade one of his toys to gain use of another child's toy.
6. **Praise Your Child for Not Biting:**
  - Before you embark on any high-risk visit with other children, remind your child gently not to bite.
  - Then if he doesn't bite, praise him afterward for being a "good friend". Praise your child especially when he is in settings in which he used to bite.
7. **Biting in Child Care Settings - Special Instructions:**
  - Biting behavior is common in child care settings. This plan can be shared with child care staff to stop the behavior in their setting.
  - Provide close supervision and quickly place the biting child in time-out, even when he looks like he is going to bite someone.
  - Reassure the staff that while biting must be stopped, it is not medically harmful. Reason: Bites from baby teeth rarely break the skin.
  - Calling the parent at work is pointless. The problem should be dealt with immediately by the person who sees it.

## Call Your Doctor If

- Biting causes a cut that breaks the skin
- Your child bites or hurts himself
- Your child has many other behavior problems
- Biting has not stopped after using this plan for 4 weeks
- You have other questions or concerns

### Pediatric Care Advice

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