



# HOW TO HANDLE BITING

Several factors need to be taken into account when dealing with children and biting. Children bite because they are curious, copying the behavior of others, angry, trying to get what they want, teething, frustrated or even just trying to establish social contact. One of the first considerations in dealing with a biter is the age of the child.

Children under 2.5 years of age are notorious for biting. Biting is an age appropriate response for children this age, who usually do not have the socialization and verbal skills to indicate their needs in more acceptable ways. A toddler may bite just to see what biting feels like.

The preschooler generally bites due to total frustration at a situation. The preschooler usually feels quite defensive about the bite and justified in this action. "I had the truck first!", or "It's my turn," are reasons enough for a bite.

A school age biter is usually frustrated beyond control at a specific situation and feels very guilty about the bite. A school age child who is a habitual biter

needs professional help.

*Talk with children about appropriate ways to express feelings.*

Whatever the cause or the age, biting by any child cannot be

tolerated. It is not safe, socially acceptable or conducive to positive interaction. Biting hurts, and it is not okay to hurt others.

## Prevention

Be alert to possible biting situations. Anger, frustration and grabbing among children can easily develop into biting. Intervention techniques may include redirection, standing next to an upset child, and helping children verbalize their feelings. Let children know biting hurts and you will not tolerate biting. "I know you are angry, but I won't let you bite anyone, and I won't let anyone bite you."

Encourage and promote appropriate behavior. Talk with children about appropriate ways to express feelings. Give children opportunities for practicing socialization skills through dramatic play, helping

each other with tasks and talking together about their experiences.

Give children positive reinforcement with smiles, hugs, and statements such as, "I'm glad to see you today," and "I like the way you used your words to tell Jenny you are angry," or "You are so smart, you figured out how to use the blocks together."



Provide activities such as playdough, painting, water play, outside play that let children express and work out their feelings.

When tempers seem to be rising or behavior becoming out of bounds, change the environment. Go outside, play some music and have everyone dance, read a story, get out the playdough or paints, do something different. Provide some "private spaces" where a child may play alone if they want.

## Dealing with the bite:

1. Keep the events around biting from becoming too interesting. Lavish attention on the victim. If the victim will allow it, have the biter help wash the bite and put ice on it. Tell the victim, "I'm sorry that happened to you," so that the biter realizes you are upset.
2. Separate the biter from the rest of the group, if necessary, to let the child calm down but still be able to observe what is going on. If separation is used, 1 minute for each year of age with a maximum of 5 minutes is the recommended time.
3. Talk with the children about the cause for the biting and what the biter could have done instead of biting.
4. Inform the parents of the bitten child of the bite before they see teeth marks or hear about it from their child. Biting is an emotionally charged issue with parents. Let the parents know what you plan to do so their child will not be bitten again.
5. Tell the parents of the biter about the incident and what you plan to do to help alleviate any recurrence. Parents of the biter need to be reassured they do not have a monster in their family and also given information for preventing further biting.