

Biting: Understanding & Responding



Why Children Bite

Biting is a form of communication and is age-appropriate for children under three years old. Our job as parents is to decode the reason behind the bite and understand what your child is trying to communicate.



Teething (6–12 months)

Infants may bite while teething or as they explore objects with their mouth. Usually not intentional or aggressive.



Frustration (12–36 months)

Most common in toddlers. Often due to frustration, limited verbal skills, or a need for attention.



Excitement or Attention

Some children bite out of excitement or as a way to get a big reaction and engage with caregivers.

Identifying the Pattern



Keep a Log

Track when your child bites to identify patterns over time.



Antecedent

What happens *before* the bite? Note the setting, people, and activity.



Behavior

Observe exactly what happens *during* the biting incident.



Consequence

What happens *after* the bite? Your response matters and can reinforce or reduce the behavior.



Predict & Plan

Once you spot a pattern, you can anticipate biting moments and plan a calm, consistent response.

How to Respond in the Moment



Keep Anger in Check

Reacting with anger or punishment doesn't teach an alternative. A big reaction can even reinforce attention-seeking biting.



Gently Separate

Calmly separate the child and name the feeling: "Biting hurts. Are you frustrated because the puzzle piece doesn't fit? I can help you."



Offer an Alternative

If biting for attention: "Ouch! That hurts! If you want to play, you can give me a hug or ask for tickles."



Redirect to Objects

Offer a teething toy or another safe object to bite as an outlet for discomfort or sensory need.



Reinforce the Alternative

When they choose a better behavior, smile, tickle, or say: "That's much nicer than biting, thank you!"

Looking Ahead



A Passing Phase

Biting typically decreases as children develop language and social skills. It is a phase, not a reflection of your child or your parenting.



Be Consistent

Model calm behavior every time. Children are always learning from how you respond.



After Age 3

If biting continues past 36 months, it may relate to stress, emotional regulation difficulties, or other underlying concerns.



Seek Support

Reach out to your parent coach, psychologist, or pediatrician for individualized support. You are not alone.



Patience & Empathy

With patience and empathy, you can guide your child to communicate in healthier, safer ways.

References

- References: American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), Zero to Three, and peer-reviewed research on child self-regulation and socialization.