

Biting is a normal developmental behavior for babies and toddlers, although sometimes biting is caused or intensified by other factors. Not all children do it and some do it for longer than others, but it is very common for young children to go through a phase in which they bite.

There are a variety of developmental impulses that cause the behavior:

- Anger
- Frustration
- Frustration coupled with limited vocabulary
- Communication
- Physical needs
- Teething pain
- Imitation
- Exploration
- Experimentation
- Social exploration
- Release of tension
- Attention seeking
- Being powerful
- Sensory pleasure
- Initiating play or affection
- Accidentally

Responding to children who bite:

- **Set a limit:** When a bite is about to happen, physical and verbal limit setting often comes first. You can hold the child's mouth away from the intended target and say, "I am not going to let you bite Tyrone." Or "I will help you stop biting." You can do this by gently cupping your hand over the child's mouth. If you stay calm, you will avoid raising the tension level of the interaction.
- **Honor the impulse:** Through observation and by knowing the child (that he gets stressed in big crowds, that he tends to bite when he's tired) you can make an educated guess about why the child is biting. Then you check it out with the child: "It looks like you want to say 'hi' to Joshua." "I wonder if you're trying to tell Pablo to move." "I'm wondering if your mouth is hurting." Then watch for the child's reaction. If the child relaxes or cries, that may be a sign that you've hit on the right reason.

- **Give social information:** "Biting hurts. I won't let you bite people."
- **Redirect:** Redirect the child either to bite something else or to channel his initial impulse into behavior that is more acceptable.
 - If you think the child is biting because his teeth are hurting, you can say: "Looks like you need something to chew on." You can bite on this washcloth (soft toy, plastic ring, sock)." Then place the object within reach of the child's mouth.
 - If you think the child is biting because he's angry, you can say, "Looks like you're really mad! You can roar like a lion." Or "It looks like you want Mohammed to stop pushing you. You can tell him 'Stop!'"
 - If you think the bite is a social gesture, you can say, "It looks like you want to say 'hi' to Georgia. You can say 'hi.' You can hand her a toy. You can sit in the sand box with her."

Redirection is a technique that can be used not just by adults but by kids, too, as Janis relates. "My older son Lee, was playing with his younger brother. Calvin, who was two. Calvin was biting a lot at the time. They were on the couch together and Lee had his little brother in his arms. Calvin was coming at Lee with his mouth open. It looked like he was ready to bite, and Lee kept saying, 'Kisses! Kisses! Kisses!' By the time Calvin's mouth reached Lee, it as a kiss. Lee made it clear to Calvin what was okay to do with his mouth."

- **Don't bite them back:** There's a school of thought that says, "Bite children back so they'll see that it hurts." But there are several problems with this line of thinking. First, biting hurts kids. Second, babies and toddlers aren't capable of real empathy, so the fact that their arm hurts won't necessarily be taken as evidence that someone else's arm hurts. Third, if we bite them back, we essentially tell them, "Biting is an okay thing to do." They learn the rule "if you're bigger or stronger or older, biting is something you can do." It 's challenging, but crucial, that we set limits for kids in ways that model behavior we want to see back from them.

"The mission of Community Resources for Children is to provide resources for the early care and education of children in Napa County"

- **It is crucial not to stigmatize a child who bites.** Calling a child a “biter” or a “piranha” can reinforce the behavior. The child thinks to them self, “Oh, I’m a biter. I guess that’s what I do in the world.”

can help them to make changes in their habits.

Excerpt from **Early Violence Prevention Tools for Teachers of Young Children** by Ronald G. Slaby, Wendy C. Roedell, Diana Arezzo, and Kate Hendrix

Biting: Facilitating Resolution between Children

When one child bites another child, your first impulse may be to separate them. But often the moments that follow the injury are full of valuable lessons for both children. When we remove the child who bites and only comfort the other child, neither child is allowed to complete the interaction. If, however, we facilitate a resolution between the children, we have the opportunity to teach several things: how to communicate safely, how to respond to being hurt, and how not to bite.

(Excerpt from **Becoming The Parent You Want to be** by Laura Davis and Janis Keyser)

Helping Children with Aggressive Behavior Patterns in the Classroom

- **Recognize that teachers have a responsibility to prevent or stop violent behavior in their classrooms.** Doing so is important both for children who behave aggressively and for other children in the class.
- **Follow the basis strategies for handling aggression when children show severe or persistent patterns of aggression, even if you decide to use more intensive and individualized methods as well.** Using proven educational strategies, as suggested in the book listed below, are especially important in these cases.
- **Design individualized behavior-change plans to help children who behave aggressively.** Base the plans on careful observations, put them in writing to maximize consistency, and revise them as needed, depending on results.
- **Consider a system of concrete reminders or incentives for children who require extra support to begin the process of change.** Let children know that these systems are temporary. Help children focus on self- control and the naturally occurring social consequences of behavior change.
- **Consider using a brief time-out procedure for aggression as one in a range of corrective consequences.** Explain and demonstrate to children the rules and procedures of time-out and the reasons for its use. Guard against excessive use of the misuse of time-out.
- **Provide extra support to children who show aggressive behavior patterns.** While maintaining consistency and following the behavior-change plan, let the children know that their feelings and needs are important, that you care about them, and that you