

# Biting

Does your child bite? Are you receiving complaints from other parents that your child has bitten another child? Maybe your child bites you? Biting can be a common behaviour for toddlers and preschoolers. Children may use biting for all types of reasons. Let's take a look at some of those.

## Why do kids bite?

Children may bite for many reasons; and while most biting occurs in infants and toddlers, sometimes older children will bite as well.

Like all behaviour, biting is happening for a reason. It might be that your child is teething or has a tooth that is bothering them. It could be a way of communicating a feeling. Whatever the reason, often a few strategies can help it stop.



## But, they are not a baby anymore!

Infants use their mouth to explore their world; but so do toddlers and even preschoolers. Many things go in their mouth: fingers, toys, food, toes and even other people's body parts! As infants, we know this might happen, offer teething toys to chew and soothers to suck in time of distress.

As infants grow into toddlers, they understand so much about what is going on around them, but they don't have the words to express themselves yet. Sometimes biting is their way to communicate feelings, such as to get a sibling to move away or a friend to give up a toy.

## Be a detective.

Try to find out more information about the biting. Answering some of these questions may be helpful in finding the reason why the biting occurred.

- What time during the day does biting happen?
- Where is your child when they are biting? Is the space small? Do they need more room?
- Are there certain friends or family that only get bitten?
- Is your child talking? Was your child trying to communicate something?
- Is your child getting new teeth?
- Was your child angry, sad, or frustrated when biting?
- What were you doing at that time? Was your child trying to get your attention?



# Reasons Your Child Might Bite

## Thirsty or Hungry

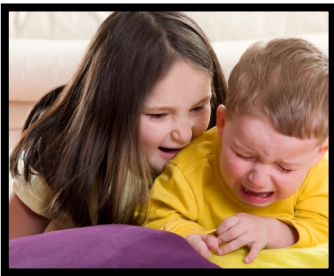
A bite could be a case of a hungry or thirsty child. If biting occurs around snack or meal times, they may be trying to communicate that they are in need of a drink or snack. Think about these ideas to reduce biting when your child is **hungry or thirsty**...

- Have small snacks and drinks available throughout the day.
- If a bite occurs just prior to a meal or snack time, provide them the words to identify they are hungry like “I’m hungry.”



## Social interaction

Sometimes young children will bite when they want to play, to take a turn with a toy or tell a friend they are too close. Also, children like to show affection at times and sometimes a kiss can turn into a chomp. If your child is trying to **socialize**, try these ideas...



- Give your child some space. This might be a quiet area that they can cuddle up in.
- When children are playing, ensure they have enough space to play and are not crowded.
- Have multiple of the same toys in the environment to avoid grabbing.

## Attention seeking

Attention is attention, whether it is a happy or a hurt response. Sometimes children will bite to get a big response from a parent or a friend. If you think your child is trying to get your **attention**, try something like this...

- Increase attention and give praise around **any** behaviours that your child uses instead of biting.
- Minimize the attention you give to your child when they bite. Instead, comfort the child who was bit or reduce your own response if your child bit you.



## Feelings

Many bites are a result of big feelings and the lack of words to describe them. For example, if a child bites a friend because they grabbed a toy away, the child may feel upset, angry or sad. The child may just want to get that toy back. If your child is biting to show their **feelings**, try...



- Help your child to label their feelings. You can say: “You look sad that your friend took your toy.”
- Teach them to say “Mine” or “Stop” when a peer takes a toy.
- Acknowledge your child’s feelings, say “It is hard to learn to take turns.”

## Types of bites

Figure out why your child is biting. Give them another way to communicate what they want. Here are some reasons your child may bite and a few strategies to try to reduce or stop the biting.

### Testing or exploring

While exploring their world, children put things in their mouth to feel, taste and bite. It might be learning about cause and effect, if I bite this, what happens? Sometimes children are just trying to find out information about the thing they are putting in their mouth. If your child is **testing**, try these ideas...

- Give your child many different varieties of objects and toys they can put in their mouth that are safe.
- Try some different tastes and foods that will give your child's senses an awakening!
- Try different textures, such as soft, hard, bumpy, crinkly or fuzzy.



### Teething or dental concerns

Your child might have some pain or discomfort when they are getting new teeth. It can be a natural response to chew or bite on something or someone to relieve pain. If your child is **teething** try these ideas...



- Talk to your dentist or doctor for other medical causes.
- Use teething rings or chewy necklaces that are made for teething. When your child bites, offer them the another option.
- Pay attention to cues your child is giving you that their teeth are hurting. Offer the teething item **before** they bite.



## Preventing and responding to biting.

Still stuck about what you can do? Try some of these ideas to prevent biting:

- Stay close to your child. Shadow them when they are in the situations they might try to bite, such as playing with peers or taking turns with a toy.
- Read books about biting that are age appropriate. Stories can help give children ideas of what else their teeth are used for.
- Keep providing your child with the words to label feelings, such as “I am mad.”, telling peers to “Stop” or requests such as “My turn.”
- Teach your child to be gentle. Give your child a lot of attention and praise when they use the skill.
- If your child bites a peer, you could say “Biting hurts,” comfort the peer and begin to take care of the bite. Your child can go gather a wash cloth or ice, but avoid letting your child touch the peer as they may be fearful of another bite.
- If your child bites you, you might say “Biting hurts” and set them down or move away from them for a short period of time. Don’t bite back. This may teach them that biting is okay when angry.



## Remember.....

- Biting can be **common** in children.
- When a child bites, they are trying to **communicate** something. Try to find the **reason**.
- **Teach** your child a new skill to communicate instead of biting.
- **Praise and reward** often, especially when they are using the new skill.
- **Don't** bite your child back. This may encourage more biting.

Resources and information have been taken from the following sources:

[www.kidshealth.org](http://www.kidshealth.org)

[www.apa.org](http://www.apa.org)

[www.betterkidcare.psu.edu](http://www.betterkidcare.psu.edu)



### The Regional Municipality of Durham

Social Services Department,

Children's Services Division

605 Rossland Road East

905-668-7711 or 1-800-387-0642

[behaviouralsupports@durham.ca](mailto:behaviouralsupports@durham.ca)

[www.durham.ca](http://www.durham.ca)

If you require this information in an accessible format, please contact 1-800-372-1102 ext. 2829.