



# Biting

Children's Developmental and Behavioural Supports



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 (Healthwise Staff, 2023).

## 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 (Stanford Medicine Children's Health, 2024).

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 (Healthwise Staff, 2023).



## 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 (Penn State, 2024).

- 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?



### 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 (Penn State, 2024).

## 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 (CSEFEL, n.d.).

### 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 need a drink or snack (Penn State, 2024). 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" (Penn State, 2024).

## 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 (Healthwise, 2023). 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 (Penn State, 2024).



## 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 (Stanford Medicine Children's Health, 2024). If your child is biting to show their feelings, try the following:

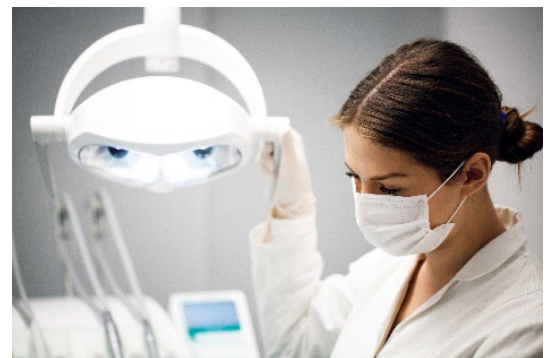


- Help your child to label their feelings. You can say: "You look sad that your friend took your toy.". (Healthwise, 2023).
- Teach them to say "Mine" or "Stop" when a peer takes a toy (Healthwise, 2023).
- Acknowledge your child's feelings, say "It is hard to learn to take turns." (Healthwise, 2023)

## 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 (Penn State, 2024). 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 another option.
- Pay attention to cues your child is giving you that their teeth are hurting. Offer the teething item before they bite (Penn State, 2024)





## 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 (Stanford Medicine Children's Health, 2024). 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 (Stanford Medicine Children's Health, 2024).
- 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.



## 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 (Penn State, 2024). 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 (Healthwise, 2023).
- 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 (CSEFEL, n.d.).



## Additional Resources

<https://www.autism.net/resources/visual-gallery>

## References

Healthwise Staff. (2023). *Learning About Biting in Children*. Myhealth.alberta.ca.

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Penn State (2024). *Biting*. Extension Better Kid Care. <https://extension.psu.edu/programs/betterkidcare/early-care/tip-pages/all/bitinghttps://extension.psu.edu/programs/betterkidcare/early->

The Center on Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL). (n.d.). *Responding to Your Child's Bite*. Vanderbilt University. [https://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/documents/biting-parenting\\_tool.pdf](https://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/documents/biting-parenting_tool.pdf)

Stanford Medicine Children's Health. (2024). *Why Children Bite*.

<https://www.stanfordchildrens.org/en/topic/default?id=why-children-bite-90-P02860>

## Information

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