

Unhelpful responses

Avoid labelling a child as a 'biter'. Negative labels can affect how you view the child, and even affect the child's feelings about themselves.

Never bite a child back to punish or show him how it feels to be bitten. Biting a child sends a message that using violence is an acceptable behaviour that can be used to solve problems.

Avoid getting angry, yelling, or shaming the child.

Avoid giving too much attention to a child who bites after an incident. While this is usually negative attention, it can still reinforce the behaviour and cause a child to repeat it.

Do not punish children who bite. Punishment does not help children to learn discipline and self-control. Instead, it makes children angry, upset, defiant, and embarrassed. It also undermines the relationship between you and your child.

Strategies we will use when a child bites

Observe the child to learn where, when, and in what situations biting occurs. Sometimes an adult may need to stay close to the child to prevent biting.

Pay attention to signals. Stay close and step in if the child seems ready to bite.

Suggest acceptable ways to express strong feelings. We will help your child learn to communicate their wants and needs.

Reinforce positive behaviour by acknowledging your child's appropriate words and actions.

Provide opportunities for your child to make choices and feel empowered.

Offer foods with a variety of textures to meet children's sensory needs.

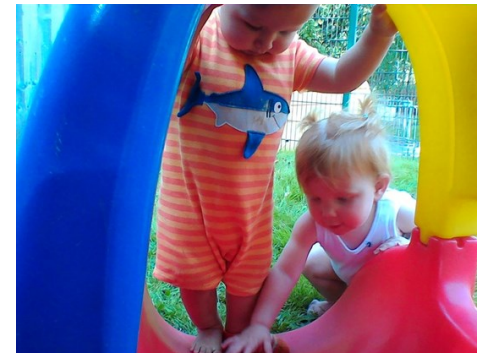
Teach your child words for setting limits, such as 'no', 'stop', or 'that's mine'.

***Please remember these are young children. They do not bite to be unkind; they just haven't learnt the skills to deal with their emotions or social situations yet.**



A guide to support parents when a child bites or is bitten.

It is important to remember young children are developmentally not as experienced as older children in dealing with social and emotional situations. They are inexperienced human beings. Young children are just really beginning to explore the bigger social world and, in many instances, mixing with children outside of their own family groups for the first time. Their ability to problem solve, communicate, negotiate and cope with social situations is still just beginning to develop.



Why do some children bite and what can we do

It's one of those thoroughly embarrassing parenting moments when you discover your child is 'the biter'. While this is how many parents can feel, biting is, for some children, a normal part of exploring their environment and a response to under-developed toddler communication skills. This doesn't make the behaviour okay, however understanding why children may bite along with some simple strategies can help parents navigate this phase of childhood with greater ease and confidence; and a lot less stress.

Young children get frustrated at times because they are unable to regulate their emotions. They have not yet fully learned how to moderate their emotions by themselves as adults do. Situations become overwhelming for them and they can lose control which may result in tantrums – expressions of overwhelming feelings which they cannot manage in any other way.

Until they develop appropriate social and emotional skills such as turn taking and empathy, they may not understand how their actions affect other people. However, as they get older, children's social development starts making them feel and show empathy.

Evidence suggests that up to a quarter of all children will bite others at some stage. Biting is a typical behaviour often seen in young children. While not uncommon, biting can be upsetting. It's best to discourage it from the very first episode.



Why do young children bite?

- ◆ Some children bite instinctively, because they have not developed self-control.
- ◆ To relieve pain from teething. Providing something to chew on can help.
- ◆ To explore cause and effect ('what happens when I bite?').
- ◆ To experience the sensation of biting.
- ◆ To satisfy a need for oral-motor stimulation.
- ◆ To imitate other children and adults.
- ◆ Biting can be a way of trying to get attention from parents / staff and other children, and also a way to get the toys they want to play with quickly, especially if that behaviour has worked in the past.
- ◆ As an act in self-defence.
- ◆ To communicate or express difficult feelings, such as frustration, anger, confusion, or fear.

How should you respond when a child bites?

Dealing with biting all comes down to having an understanding of the behaviour. Young children, because of their age and development, can be very egocentric and may often find it difficult to think about and understand how their actions impact on others. It is unrealistic to think that all young children in early learning settings will have the developmental skills to share and show care to others. By having clear expectations that the child understands really well, and helping your little one to learn the skills needed to be successful in sharing, using their words, and empathy are really important skills to teach.

Children learn about the world around them by exploring it with their hands, eyes and mouths. But young children often need help to learn what they should and shouldn't bite. If your child takes an experimental bite on a mother's breast or grandad's shoulder, **DO NOT LAUGH**, stay calm and use clear signals to communicate that it is not okay for one person to bite another. A firm 'no' or 'no biting' is an appropriate response.