



When Little Ones Bite



A Guide for Parents with Tips and Strategies to Help Prevent Infants and Toddlers from Biting



Children biting is both the most common—and the most difficult—aspect of child development, especially with infants and toddlers. When biting incidents occur, it is often scary, frustrating, and stressful for children and their family. Biting is a stage some children go through and is a behavior of a young child who is just learning to manage their emotions and exploring the world. The good news is there is a lot you can do as a parent to reduce and eliminate biting.



Why do children bite?

Here are a few of the most common reasons that children bite.

Teething – When new teeth are coming in, children find comfort in applying pressure to their gums, often using anything that is readily available.

Impulsiveness – Children sometimes bite simply because there is something to bite. The biting is not intentional nor an act of aggression. It is a way of exploring the world.

Making an Impact – Young children like to see the cause and effect of their actions. When they bite, the reaction is immediate and dramatic.

Over-Stimulation – Even when children are happy, a situation where a child is over-stimulated may cause them to bite.

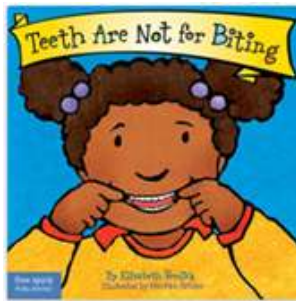
Frustration – Children may use biting as a form of expressing frustration, especially before they are able to express their feelings through words.



What should you do when a child bites?

Rest assured that children outgrow biting, as it is part of growing up. Here are a few suggestions to help reduce biting:

Read books about biting. – As you read the books, talk about feelings. How do you think Travis felt when he was bitten? What could Jasmine do instead of biting? Here are a few of our favorite books:



Teeth Are Not for Biting by Elizabeth Verdick

The book shares ideas of positive things children can do instead of biting. It also includes helpful hints for parents on how to reduce the biting habit of their child.



No Biting! by Karen Katz

This interactive, lift-the-flap book shows children what is appropriate to bite. Your little one will enjoy lifting the flaps in the book and the important lesson on what is okay to bite.

Provide teething support. – Offer your child a teether or other safe item to bite.

Support communication and language development. – If your child is biting as an alternative to using language to express herself, help your child express her feelings in appropriate ways. For example: “Emma, you are angry because Henry took the book you were reading.” Then suggest an appropriate way to deal with being angry. “Let’s talk to Henry.”



Be proactive. – Help your child cope with over-stimulation by trying to avoid shopping trips, playdates, and other events if your child is over-tired, as being over-tired can be a trigger for biting. Schedule important appointments such as a doctor visit or dentist appointments for a time when your little one is fed and well-rested. Hug your child if you sense he is feeling stressed. A hug is a great calming activity for both you and your child.

Help your child understand the effects of their actions. – After your little one bites, say, “You bit Liam, and now he is crying. When you bite, it hurts your friends. You may bite food (insert the name of your child’s favorite snack), but not your friends. It hurts.”

Keep active. – Go for a walk, turn on music and let your child dance while you are cooking dinner, have fun with bubbles (chase them, catch them, count them, or pop them), or engage in any other family-favorite movement activity. Keeping your little one active reduces the likelihood of biting.

With your loving support, your little one will develop skills to reduce and eliminate biting.

