

Biting

Why infants and toddlers bite:

- Teething - when the child's gums are sore, biting is a pain reliever.
- Exploration - the child naturally puts things in his/her mouth for oral stimulation
- Cause and effect - the child wants to get a response
- Language frustration - the child has not learned more acceptable ways to communicate when he/she feels cornered or threatened.
- Imitating behavior - the child may be innocently copying something they've seen.
- Attention - the child may be trying to get more of your time and attention.
- Anxiety - biting may relieve tension for the child.

After age three or so, biting may become a deliberate way to express anger or intimidate others. Biting can result in a puncture or cut. It is a serious misbehavior which calls for your close attention.

Take steps to reduce biting incidents. Teach your child words and help him/her talk about his/her anger. "You are mad. Tell Mandy to stop!" Watch your child closely whenever she is around other children or in situations where s/he is likely to bite.

Always treat biting as a serious matter. Interrupt biting with a sharp, "No." Be sure to use a serious voice and look your child straight in the eye. Never laugh when your child bites, and don't treat it like a game (love bites). Make sure older siblings follow your lead.

NEVER BITE BACK. This may teach your child that biting is okay if you are bigger. Don't use punitive punishment like using soap to wash out your child's mouth, pinching his/her cheek, or slapping.

Praise good behavior and your child's efforts to use words to get what s/he wants.

Pointers for Parents:

- ✓ Make a family rule that "We never bite people." Biting hurts.
- ✓ Give safe alternative behavior such as giving a toy or teething ring to bite.
- ✓ Help the child learn and use words to get what they need.
- ✓ NEVER BITE BACK. The child may learn it's okay as long as you're bigger.
- ✓ Biting is a serious issue, no matter the reason. Be firm in your response. Biting hurts.
- ✓ Watch for signs that your child might bite. Get involved and help your child meet his/her needs.
- ✓ Praise your child for not biting.