



## Children and Biting

### **Babies who bite**

All children bite at some point in their early years. Biting usually begins accidentally during the teething phase. It is one of the best ways to explore their environment. Some infants may also bite when they are excited or while playing. Even with infant biting, it is a good idea to redirect the behavior. Instead of allowing your infant to bite you, give her a teething ring or soft toy to chew.

### **Toddlers who bite**

Biting may continue or increase between the ages of two and three years old and should stop around age three. Many children bite out of frustration to get what they want. A common cause for biting is wanting a toy from another child. After age three, if the biting continues to happen, it may be a more serious situation that requires professional help.

### **Stopping the biting**

Biting is unacceptable behavior and there are steps you can take to curb it.

- Establish the idea that all biting is forbidden. Whenever your child bites, even if it is playfully, look her firmly in the eye and, in an unfriendly voice say something like, “No biting,” or “Stop biting. That hurts.” Toddlers may not realize that their bites cause pain. Keep your redirection short and simple. Avoid lengthy explanations or reasoning; this extra attention may actually reinforce the behavior, making it more likely that your child will bite again.
- Make sure your child knows that biting is not a game. Never laugh when your child bites, even if it is done playfully. Also, you should avoid giving playful “love” bites to your child, since she is unable to understand why these bites are okay but her bites are not.
- Deal with biting as you would any other aggressive behavior. Quickly pull the biter away from the “bitee.” After saying, “No biting,” immediately give the child a brief time out. If the time out does not work, take away a favorite toy or activity. Make sure the biting does not get rewarded. Do not punish biting with other aggressive behavior, such as hitting the child. Most important, never, never bite the child back! This suggests to the child that biting is okay if you are an adult.
- Often biting continues because it allows a child to get what she wants. Offer your child alternative ways of making her desires known. If she wants the blocks that another child has, tell her to point to them and ask for them nicely, or to ask you for help.
- Model appropriate behaviors at home. Make sure you do not display aggressive behavior toward your spouse, your children or others. Your child may be picking up her aggressive behavior from you.
- Praise your child and offer positive reinforcement when she uses appropriate behavior (asking for a toy instead of biting the child holding it).

- If attempts to intervene are unsuccessful and biting persists, a professional evaluation is in order. Discuss the behavior with your pediatrician or the developmental specialist at your child's child care center.

**Biting and germs**

Biting usually does not create a medical problem. If the skin is not broken, clean the area with soap and water. If the skin is broken and bleeding, apply pressure to stop the bleeding. Then clean the area with soap and water, and cover. Watch for signs of infection. Make sure your child is up-to-date on her tetanus shots. If your child has been bitten and the skin has been broken, ask your healthcare provider to examine her.

For more information contact Guilford County Department of Public Health at 336-641-7777 or [www.myguilford.com](http://www.myguilford.com)