

*Although it is a common behavior, children who bite upset and hurt their peers. Biting also may cause many concerns or even shock, for child care providers and for the parents involved in their program. Use this information to understand the reasons children may bite and to explore some practical suggestions to help you in your program.*

### **Reasons Children May Bite**

- Infants may bite to explore objects, express excitement or relieve teething pain. Adults can provide rubber toys to bite such as teething rings.
- Toddlers may be expressing frustration because they are unable to communicate in words. They may also be attempting to get attention or to control a situation.
- Preschoolers bite in self-defense or to express anger or frustration.

### **What to do in Response to Biting**

- Intervene quickly clearly stating “We don’t bite our friends. It hurts them.”
- Decide what would be more effective for the biter: either remove the biter from the area and focus attention on the victim instead of the biter OR have the biter help with the care by getting a washcloth or ice pack. Have the biter notice the tears and discomfort.
- Model words we use to express anger such as “Do not take my blocks.”, especially when you see tensions building. This will help children to translate their emotions into language.
- Biters are often in need of more personal space. Help them find a quiet corner.

### **Prevention**

- Try teaching what you want. “I want all children in my room/home to feel safe, so find a way to disagree without hurting each other.”
- Children who continually turn to biting may need to have an alternative in place. Try “when you feel like biting take a deep breath instead.” You may have to experiment. Perhaps squeezing a stuffed toy would work better for a particular child.

#### References

BANANAS Child Care information & Referral at [www.bananasinc.org](http://www.bananasinc.org)  
Illinois Early Learning Project at [www.illinoisearlylearning.org/tips](http://www.illinoisearlylearning.org/tips)  
Early Childhood and parenting collaborative at [www.ceep.crc.uirc.edu](http://www.ceep.crc.uirc.edu)

# *Child Care Tips: Biting*

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*Talking to the parents of children who are being bitten at childcare can be a challenge. Parents often feel angry both with the caregiver, and with the child who is doing the biting. Remember that these feelings are understandable, especially if it happens more than once. Use these suggestions when you talk with the parents of children who may be the victim of biting in your center or child care setting.*

- Help parents remember that many children are inclined to bite before they talk--before they can use words to express their feelings. For many children, biting is normal.
- Let parents know that you understand their distress.
- Assure the parents that you are working with the child who bites. Agree on an action plan. Provide consistent responses.
- Reassure parents that you will follow through and keep them informed as needed.
- Encourage the parent to teach their child coping strategies such as firmly saying, “no biting” or “stop, that hurts!” and walking away, and telling the child care provider. Work with the parents to help children who are being bitten to exercise their assertiveness.
- Let the parents know what first aid is in place. Have the parents notify the doctor if the skin is broken.
- Remind the parent that you do feel bad about the biting, and that the parent of the biter feels bad also.
- Explain to the parents that because of confidentiality you are unable to reveal the identity of the biter.

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