

TIP SHEETS

Responding to Biting

COMMON REASONS FOR BITING

- Power and control
- Attention and social interaction
- Frustration, fear, and anger
- Imitation
- Response to a major life change
- Teething, oral stimulation, and exploration

Many infants, toddlers, and young children bite. Understanding WHY can help us help children stop biting and learn to communicate their wants, needs, and feelings in a positive way.



POWER & CONTROL

Those who are bitten often react in a big way, such as raised voices or big facial expressions. These responses give the child who has bitten a sense of control.

Having choices can help a child who is biting gain a sense of control in a positive way and often reduces or eliminates biting.

ATTENTION & SOCIAL INTERACTION

Children need attention to help them feel important and included. Talk with the child and help them enter play. This supports their need to gain attention through positive social interactions.

FRUSTRATION, FEAR & ANGER

When a young child is scared or has big feelings, their reaction may be to bite. Young children are still learning how to interact with others and express themselves. Feelings can be

strong, and reactions can be quick. Guide children with coping strategies and something to do as they wait for their turn. Stay nearby and remain calm, supportive, and patient.

IMITATION

Sometimes children watch others who are biting and decide to give it a try. Model a response to the child who was biting and the child who was bitten. You can say something like, “Biting hurts, owie” or “can I help you with something?”

RESPONSE TO A MAJOR LIFE CHANGE

Change can be stressful and confusing for young children. Major life changes such as a new baby, moving, or even a new routine can cause a child to react by biting. Talk with the child about these changes and keep other areas of life as consistent as possible.

TEETHING & EXPLORATION

Infants and young toddlers put almost everything in their mouths. This is how they learn about their world. As they mouth items they are learning about tastes and textures but also what will happen each time they bite an item. Biting a person brings a big reaction

and so some children try to get that big reaction back by biting again. Offer many items for the child to explore to reduce the odds of biting.

Teething often causes swollen gums and much pain for infants and toddlers. A natural response is to apply pressure to the gums by biting on something to help relieve some of the pain. Offer lots of toys that can be used for biting.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Responding to Your Child's Bite

http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/documents/biting-parenting_tool.pdf

Toddlers and Biting:

Finding the Right Response

<https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/232-toddlers-and-biting-finding-the-right-response>

For more information, visit inclusivechildcare.org.

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