

BITING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD: SUPPORTING UNDERSTANDING AND PREVENTION

INFORMATION AND INSPIRATION SHEET

Biting is a common behaviour in early childhood, particularly among toddlers who are still developing their communication, emotional regulation, and social skills.

While it can be concerning for educators and families, biting is often a child's way of expressing unmet needs, strong emotions, or responding to overwhelming situations.

Why?



Need for oral stimulation

To explore cause & effect

Teething

Lack of language skills

Overwhelmed from environmental stimuli

Acting in self-defense





Prevention Strategies

- ✓ Observe and identify patterns or triggers that may lead to biting, such as transitions, crowded spaces, sharing challenges, fatigue, or sensory overload.
- ✓ Maintain predictable routines and schedules to help children feel safe and secure.
- ✓ Support communication skills by teaching children words, signs, or gestures to express their needs and feelings.
- ✓ Provide close supervision and intervene early when signs of frustration or conflict emerge.
- ✓ Offer appropriate items for chewing when children are teething or seeking oral sensory input.
- ✓ Ensure children have opportunities for active play, movement, and sensory experiences throughout the day.
- ✓ Create calm spaces where children can go to relax, regroup, and self-regulate when feeling overwhelmed.
- ✓ Model and teach positive problem-solving strategies such as asking for help, taking turns, and using words to express emotions.
- ✓ Reinforce positive social interactions and acknowledge children when they use appropriate ways to communicate their needs.

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Biting is not a behavior to fix, but a message to understand.



Proactive Strategies

Model simple language and support communication

Maintain developmentally appropriate expectations

Stay close and responsive to children's cues

Use consistent approach among all adults

Be an engaging play partner and intervene early





Fostering empathy

- ✓ Model empathy through everyday interactions.
- ✓ Help children label and talk about feelings.
- ✓ Use books and stories to discuss emotions and perspectives.
- ✓ Encourage children to notice and respond when a peer is hurt or upset.
- ✓ Acknowledge and celebrate acts of kindness and helping.
- ✓ Narrate emotional experiences: "Sam is crying. I wonder if Sam is feeling sad because they got hurt."
- ✓ Support children in repairing relationships after conflicts.



Helping children recognize the feelings of others lays the foundation for kindness, compassion, and belonging.



[Understanding and Responding to Children Who Bite](#)



[Toddler Biting: Finding the Right Response](#)

