

# BABY BYTES

For families with infants and young children

## Biting

It is common for children younger than age 3 to bite someone else at least once. Most often children stop biting on their own. Biting that persists past age 3 or occurs frequently at any age may need intervention. Biting is not always intentional and rarely causes serious injury to another person or poses any health risks.



## DID YOU KNOW???

Children bite for different reasons, depending on their age.

- **Between 5 and 7 months of age**, children usually bite other people when they feel discomfort around their mouths or when they are in pain caused by teething. Most often they bite their caregivers. Sometimes young babies bite their mother while breast-feeding. Children of this age learn not to bite as they see and hear the reaction of the person they have bitten.
- **Between 8 and 14 months of age**, children usually bite other people when they are excited. Most often they bite a caregiver or another child close to them. A firm "no" usually stops these children from biting again.
- **Between 15 and 36 months of age**, children may bite other people when they are frustrated or want power or control over another person. Usually they bite other children; less frequently they bite their caregivers. Children of this age usually stop biting as they learn that biting is not acceptable behaviour.
- **After age 3**, children usually bite when they feel powerless or scared, such as when they are losing a fight or think that they are going to be hurt by another person. Children older than 3 who frequently bite other people may need to be seen by a health professional. This type of biting may be a sign that a child has problems with expressing feelings or self-control.

- Babies will start **teething** within the first year of life (3 to 12 months). Biting may be a sign of your baby's teething. Biting, or pressure on the gums, helps your baby relieve some of the discomfort. Try providing him with a teething ring or teether. However, make sure that you do not tie a teether around his neck because your baby could choke himself.
- Babies bite to **experiment** with the taste, texture and response of their world.
- Some children may bite to **gain attention** from adults.
- Some children will bite in **self-defence** when they feel threatened.
- Some children might **imitate** biting, when they see another child bite.
- Some children bite to **communicate** what they want.

## PRACTICAL TIPS TO STOP BITING

**The best time to stop biting is when it first starts:**

**Make sure that no one laughs, or treats this as a game.**

**Get involved immediately.** Stay calm, don't overreact or give a lengthy explanation. Overreacting can actually increase biting because the child wants attention.

**First, comfort the child who has been bitten,** and examine the degree of harm.

**Then talk to the child who was the biter** - with a clear message. Look into the child's eyes and speak calmly, but firmly, "I do not like it when you bite people!" For a child with a more limited vocabulary, just say, "No biting people!" You can point out, "Look. You hurt him and he's crying."

As things are calming down, it is sometimes **helpful to follow up with a short explanation**, "I know you were angry, but biting hurts. We don't bite people."

**If your child bites again - and this is not unusual - remove them from the other children.**

Never bite your child back or wash his mouth out with soap. These actions generally do not stop the biting.

**To prevent future biting:**

**Try to learn your child's cues about what triggered the bite in the first place.** For example, toddlers are more likely to be aggressive when they are tired, hungry, frustrated or overexcited. When you think through the situation, reduce the conditions that seem to have triggered the biting.

**Supervise the biter closely during the week after the incident.** You may be able to intervene early, and prevent a second attempt to bite.

Every child learns NOT to bite eventually. Some children take longer than others. Just be patient, firm and consistent.

Source: [www.investinkids.ca](http://www.investinkids.ca), [www.bchealthguide.org](http://www.bchealthguide.org)

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Prepared by The Simcoe County Infant and Child Development Program  
For more information please call 726-9082 ext. 2281