

When children bite

Evidence suggests that up to a quarter of all children will bite others at some stage, mostly between the ages of 2 and 3.

We need to consider what the child is achieving by biting – consider what the reward is – does he/she get a huge amount of attention? The first bite may be impulsive but a child soon learns what gains attention.

Understanding why children bite is a key to resolving the problem.

Expressing emotions:

Some children bite as a way of showing love. Some toddlers have intense feelings and bite as a way of expressing them. This can sometimes result in a significant person (eg Mum) being the target.

Some children can bite if they get over excited

Experimenting:

Young children learn by putting things in their mouth, sometimes this may result in a bite

Defending:

Some children bite by way of defining - eg what they are playing with, they learn if they bite the other child moves away.

Controlling:

Some children use biting as a way of getting other children or parents to do what they want. Eg a younger sibling could bite to 'gain power'. Children soon learn that by biting they get a reaction (all be it negative) however it may be attention that they seek again!

Frustration or irritation:

Some young children don't have the communication to say what they feel and may bite. Eg they want a toy that another child has.

What to do?

Stay calm, don't shout.

Never bite back!

Put your hand up and give a firm and simple 'NO!' or 'No Bite!' (using a disapproving tone of voice)

Don't go into great explanations about how much they have hurt or upset you (this is giving the child attention)

Place yourself between the biter and the victim and turn your back on the biter (this directs the attention away from them and to the victim)

Take note of the situation – who do they bite, when do they bite, is there something that triggers it? This may help you to identify with the reasons above and make it possible to intervene before an incident occurs.

Use positive reinforcement – this means praise them when they are being good and demonstrating desired behaviour - to ensure that they get lots of attention for the right behaviour eg 'good boy', 'well done'. Go over the top with praise for good behaviour and reserve the attention cycle.

The technique above can also be used for children who scratch.

Make sure everyone is giving the same message/signals to the child – Parents, Grandparents, Nursery staff.