

Tips for Parents of Young Children



Parenting.
Give it time.

Biting

(suitable for 6 months - 3 years)

Most children go through a phase where they will bite another child or their Mum and Dad. They do not understand that they will hurt someone if they bite. Luckily this is usually just a phase and doesn't mean your child is aggressive.

As your child develops they will learn that biting hurts people. They will also learn the words and coping skills to express and manage their strong feelings.



Your child might bite because they are:

- exploring things and people (babies and toddlers use their mouths to explore);
- teething;
- frustrated, excited or angry and don't have the words to express themselves;
- wanting your attention;
- over tired;
- responding to another child's aggressive behaviour;
- copying others;
- worried or anxious about a change in their life like a new baby or house move; or
- interested in the reaction they get and don't understand it causes pain.

Tips for dealing with your child's biting

- Stay calm. Don't smack or bite your toddler back. This will hurt your child and give them the wrong message that this behaviour is OK.

If your child bites you:

- Calmly say something like "No biting. I don't like that – it hurt me."

- Put them slightly away from you.
- After a few minutes pick your child up again.
- Praise your child when you see them being kind to you, another child or adult. They will learn this is the behaviour you want to see.

If they bite another child:

- Say something like “No biting, it hurts”. Comment on how the other child is feeling: “Look, Jack is crying. He is crying because you bit him”.
- Tell them what you want to see “We use gentle hands”.
- Give more attention to the child who was bitten. Often when a child bites, adults give them a lot of attention. This is usually negative attention, but it may actually cause the biting or hitting to continue, rather than stop.
- Move your child away from the game they were playing for a few minutes.
- Praise your child when you see them being kind to another child. They will learn this is the behaviour you want to see.

Preventing biting

- **Have lots of safe objects for biting**, for example teething rings or crunchy snacks (like plain crackers, carrot sticks or apple pieces).
- **Try to anticipate trouble** and move your child before they bite.
- **Give your child some simple choices**, for example “red top or blue top?”, “apple or banana?” If you give your child some choices they will feel a sense of control. This may help reduce biting.
- **Help your child express their feelings**. Label your toddler’s feelings when you observe them, for example when you see that they are happy, sad, cross, disappointed or frustrated. It will help them learn the word for that feeling or emotion so they are able to learn to express how they feel later.
- **Make time for active play every day**. Go to the park, play in the garden or put some music on and dance. This will reduce your child’s anger and frustration.
- **Try to avoid stressful activities or places** where there will be lots of other children on days when your child is very tired.

Look after yourself

Meeting up with other Mums and Dads may help remind you that you’re not alone. Your **Family Information Service** will be able to tell you what’s on in your area. You can contact them by telephone on 0300 123 7777. The **Family Point** website (familypoint.cymru) also has information on services and activities in your area.

For more helpful tips on biting and on positive parenting techniques, visit: gov.wales/giveittime