



How To Handle

BITING



Biting is a common behavior observed in young children, typically between the ages of 1-3 years old.

This developmental stage coincides with the emergence of new teeth, increasing mobility, and growing social interaction, all of which can contribute to biting behavior.

Biting can be concerning for parents, teachers, and other adults caring for children. It is essential to recognize that biting is a form of communication for young children, and understanding the underlying reasons for this behavior can help in addressing and managing it effectively.

Five potential reasons why young children may engage in biting:

Teething/oral discomfort, sensory input/regulation, challenges with communication, connection seeking, or "triple O" - overwhelmed, overtired, overstimulated.



1. Teething/Oral Discomfort

Young children may bite as a way to alleviate teething pain or discomfort in their gums. The sensation of biting down provides temporary relief from soreness and irritation caused by emerging teeth. This discomfort can lead children to seek objects to bite on as a natural response to teething.

Provide teething objects to soothe sore gums. Encourage the child to use these objects when they feel the urge to bite. Additionally, offer gentle massages to the gums using clean fingers or teething toys to alleviate discomfort and provide relief during teething.

Did You Know?

Babies are born with more sensory receptors in their mouths than any other part of their body? This heightened sensitivity helps them explore and learn about their environment by mouthing objects, tasting different textures, and experiencing new sensations.

This heightened sensitivity in the mouth typically begins at birth and continues throughout infancy and early childhood, gradually diminishing as children grow older and oral exploration decreases.

2. Sensory Input/Self-regulation

Some children bite as a way to seek sensory input or to self-regulate their emotions. Biting down on objects may provide sensory stimulation and help children feel grounded and calmer in overwhelming or stimulating environments. Sensory seeking behaviors like biting can indicate a need for sensory regulation.



Create sensory-rich environments with opportunities for tactile exploration and proprioceptive input. Offer sensory bins filled with materials like rice, sand, or water, and provide sensory toys with different textures to satisfy the child's sensory needs in a safe and constructive way. Teach the child alternative self-regulation strategies such as deep breathing, squeezing stress balls, or engaging in calming activities like yoga or sensory breaks.

3. Challenges With Communication

Children who have limited verbal skills or struggle to express themselves may resort to biting as a means of communication. Biting can be a way for them to convey their needs, desires, or frustrations when they are unable to do so verbally. This behavior can be a sign of frustration or a way to express strong emotions.



Support the child's language development by modeling and encouraging verbal communication. Use simple and clear language to help the child express their needs and emotions. Provide opportunities for the child to practice communication skills through play, storytelling, and social interactions. Offer positive reinforcement and praise when the child communicates effectively without resorting to biting.

4. Connection Seeking

Biting may also occur as a way for children to seek connection and closeness with others. They may bite out of a desire for attention, affection, or a sense of belonging, especially in social situations where they feel disconnected or overwhelmed. Children may use biting as a way to connect with others (negative attention is still attention) or express their feelings of affection (feeling excited/positive can result in biting) or frustration.



Foster positive connections and relationships with the child through nurturing interactions and quality time together. Offer plenty of opportunities for physical affection, such as hugs, cuddles, and gentle touches, to meet the child's need for connection in a positive way. Establish clear and consistent boundaries around biting (e.g. you can not bite... but you can), and redirect the child's behavior towards more appropriate forms of interaction and communication.

5. "Triple O" - Overwhelmed, Overtired, or Overstimulated:

Biting behavior can also be a response to feeling overwhelmed, overtired, or overstimulated by their environment or daily experiences. When children are in a state of stress or sensory overload, they may resort to biting as a way to cope or regulate their emotions. This behavior can be a signal that the child is struggling to manage their emotions or cope with challenging situations.



Create a supportive and predictable environment that minimizes stressors and promotes relaxation. Establish regular routines for sleep, meals, and play to ensure the child gets enough rest and downtime. Use visual schedules and transition cues to help the child navigate transitions smoothly and reduce anxiety. Implement calming activities such as sensory play, quiet reading time, or calming music to help the child regulate their emotions and energy levels.

THE “NOT-TO-DO’S” OF BITING

- **Do not punish the child:** Punitive measures like yelling or time-outs can increase stress and anxiety, potentially leading to more frequent or severe biting incidents. Punishment does not address the underlying reasons for the behavior and may damage the child's trust with their parents or teachers.
- **Do not discuss the biting incident in front of the child, other parents, teachers, or children:** Publicly addressing biting behavior can embarrass or shame the child, negatively impacting their self-esteem and social interactions. It's essential to address such matters privately, maintaining the child's dignity and confidentiality.
- **Do not shame, blame, or label the child:** Labeling the child as a “biter,” “bad,” or “aggressive” can create a negative self-image and hinder their emotional development. Instead, focus on understanding the reasons behind the behavior and offering positive guidance and support.
- **Do not ignore or downplay the biting behavior:** Ignoring or minimizing biting incidents may signal to the child that their actions are acceptable or go unnoticed. It's crucial to address the behavior promptly and proactively to prevent it from escalating or becoming a recurring issue.



If efforts to address biting behavior have not led to a reduction in incidents, it may be necessary to seek additional support and guidance. Consulting with early childhood professionals, such as pediatricians, child psychologists, speech pathologists, or behavior specialists, can provide valuable insights and strategies tailored to the child's specific needs. Collaborating with these experts allows for a comprehensive assessment of the situation and the development of a targeted intervention plan.

Together, adults can explore potential underlying causes, implement effective interventions, and monitor progress over time. Remembering that each child is unique and may respond differently to interventions, patience, empathy, and a commitment to finding solutions are key as adults work together to support the child's healthy development and well-being.