

Toddlers and Biting

This leaflet is written for the advice of parents of all children whose toddler has been involved in a biting incident at pre-school. Whether your child has been bitten by another or was the biter, it will be helpful to read both advice sections. You may also find it helpful to read the other advice sheet "Why Toddlers Bite." But first a little bit of information.

Biting by toddlers is quite common. Most of them go through a phase when they bite others, thankfully it is usually quite short. It is thought that about 25% of toddlers in pre-school settings will bite another toddler at one time or another. In other words, it is a normal piece of behavioural development that many young children go through. Obviously biting is something to be discouraged and stopped as soon as possible. However, most children who bite others do not do it with any intention of hurting others. In fact, younger children often do not yet understand that they are hurting others by biting them.

My child was bitten at pre-school. What should I do?

Although it is very hard when our children are hurt, the best thing is to stay calm and not get angry. If the biting happened in a pre-school then the staff there will have dealt with the situation. Your child is more likely to become more upset if you show signs of being upset and angry yourself.

Your reactions

Your reactions to the situation are very important. While you will want to comfort your child, do not make a 'big thing' of it. In a very few cases this can be so rewarding for a child that the child seeks to be hurt by others again in the hope of getting big rewards from you again. Encourage your child to be friends with the biter. This might seem strange but the more friends your child has the happier he or she will be. It will also help to encourage the biter to be friendly to your child and therefore less likely to be aggressive towards him or her.

Be a good example

Be sympathetic to the other mum, dad or carer. They will be very embarrassed by what has happened. They will be very anxious about how you feel about things. If your child and the other child can see the adults being sensible and thoughtful about the event then they will learn a good lesson

about how to have proper relationships. If you are friendly with the other carer then it is likely that your child is a friend of the other one. Falling out over one incident with your children would be a shame it gives a bad message to your children about friendship.

Keep in touch with the pre-school staff

Talk with the staff at the pre-school. They may want to ask you some questions about your child. That is not because they want to blame your child or excuse the biter, it is just that they want to understand the situation to help them prevent the biting happening again. The pre-school will have a behaviour policy and may have a special section relating to aggressive behaviour. As a result, they may have a plan to deal with such incidents and the support of parents is always very helpful. They will really appreciate your co-operation and support.

Any Injury

Obviously, you will want to check any injury to your child. Again, the pre-school will have made any necessary checks, but of course, you will want to check for yourself. If you are concerned about any injury then you should seek some advice from your local doctor or practice nurse. You should be more concerned if the skin has been broken.

Toddlers Biting

My child has bitten another child. What should I do?

This is something that horrifies most parents. But, the important thing is to be calm and rational about the situation and deal with your child firmly, but in a sensitive way. Remember, as well, that if the biting happened at pre-school, then the staff there will have already dealt with your child so you should not need to punish him or her. Here are a few suggestions that might help.

Rules

It is always helpful to have rules. However, the best rules tell us what to do rather than what not to do.

So, the best rule might be something like “We are always kind to other people.” You may find that your pre-school has a special positive way of saying the rule about biting. Find out what it is and use it yourself. Remind your child of the rule when you say bye-bye in the morning.

Be Firm

If the incident was not in pre-school you will have to deal with it. Follow these steps:

- Be firm but not unkind.
- Keep your words simple for example, “No! - Biting hurts!”
- Don’t make too big an issue of it. It was wrong but it is over now.
- Make sure they can’t bite the other child again but try not to move them completely away.
- Try not to give them lots of attention because of the biting. Give attention to the child who was bitten, by comforting them and checking them for injury. That way they will not learn that bad behaviour gets attention
- Return to normal as soon as possible. Keep your eyes open for the next time they are being good and praise them then and there for doing what you want.

Be Consistent

Children feel safest and behave best when adults have clear rules and consistently apply them without withdrawing their love. Try to deal with bad behaviour in the same way each time but deal with the behaviour without stopping loving and liking your child, even for a few moments.

Catch them Being Good

It is very important that you find ways to praise your child. Look out for good behaviour (just ordinary good behaviour; it doesn’t have to be very good behaviour). What you do need to do is to encourage them to ‘be good’ and behave positively. That is a

much more effective way than trying to stop bad behaviour by punishment. Praising children for good behaviour makes them feel much more secure and safe with you. Research tells us that one ‘telling off’ is as powerful as three ‘wel-dones’, so you have work at the praising. Praise is the magic that works with children as it tells them that they are getting attention for doing the right thing, and they learn what they have to do rather than just learning what they shouldn’t do.

Talk to the Pre-School

If the incident was at pre-school the staff will have dealt with the incident. They may need your support to help them prevent it happening again. They will want to work with you, which means they may want to ask you questions about your child and about home. They are not prying and they will be confidential. What they are doing is trying to understand why your child bit someone to help them prevent it happening again. Sometimes a very simple thing happening at home can cause upset and anxiety for toddlers, which they show by their behaviour at pre-school rather than at home.

Talk to the other parents or carers

Of course you will be embarrassed about the incident if your child bit another child. The other parents may be anxious about how you feel. Yes, they may be angry but most parents of toddlers just want to understand and help each other. The best way to start is with a simple apology and a show of interest in how the other child is. Like you, the other parents will be most interested in finding out why and preventing it happening again so talking to each other is the best starting place.

Get back to normal

Yes, you are unhappy with your child’s behaviour. Remember that the incident is over and has been dealt with. It is important to give reminders before they start pre-school the next day, but once the incident is over it is time to get back to normal.

For further information, or if you feel you might need some help with child contact Charles Ward via:
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