

## Why toddlers bite

it is a very common thing for most toddlers to go through a phase where they bite other toddlers or even adults. It is thought that at least 25% of children in pre-school settings will, at one stage bite another child in the setting. While it is not acceptable behaviour, your child biting another or being bitten by another is not something to get angry about all worry about unduly, especially if this is the first time it has happened.

Understanding why children bite is a key to being able to stop them. Toddlers do not always bite to hurt someone else. In fact, they cannot really understand their causing pains to others. Toddler biting is best understood as a way of communicating with others. Obviously, it is not a way of communicating that one wants to encourage, but understanding why behaviour happens, helps as to deal with it. There are several reasons why a toddler may be biting and some of them are discussed below.

### Exploration.

Young infants learn by exploring, which means lots of touching, smelling, hearing and tasting. Give an infant, a toy and one of the first things he or she will do is put it in their mouth. At about 12 months, children really begin to explore their world and the objects in it. Unfortunately, they do not yet understand the difference between gnawing biting, often with unfortunate circumstances!

### Teething

Infants begin teething at about 4 to 7 months. Their gums can be tender and cause discomfort and soon learned that chewing on objects can help to relieve their discomfort. Unfortunately, some children do not, at this age, understand the difference between chewing and object biting a person.

### Attention

Adults take biting seriously and can react very strongly to children who bite. But adult attention helps children learn very quickly; in this case that biting is a good way of getting attention. Children know that being ignored is no fun and biting is a good way of becoming the centre of attention, even if it is the centre of negative attention.

### Imitation

Toddlers love to imitate each other. This is especially true if they see older children bite and get lots of adult attention for what they have done. Then they may try to test it out for themselves. Sometimes adults bite back as a punishment. That doesn't stop children biting, but it does say to the child; biting is okay!

### Expressing Emotion.

Oddly enough, biting can be a way of showing love. Sometimes toddlers have very strong emotions that they don't know how to express or how to connect with the object of their emotion.. Biting is one way that they can make contact with the object of their emotion.

### **Defending**

When children are in situations where they feel threatened and they do not have the language skills to help them out they will probably take defensive action. For some children. The defensive action might be running and hiding, for others it may be more aggressive behaviour - like hitting-out or biting.

### **Frustration and Irritation.**

Some toddlers take a long time to learn about turn-taking and sharing. These children probably don't have the communication skills they need to make their wants or frustrations known. A toddler may have lost a toy to another and want it back, or may want a biscuit or just even some attention. This will cause them some stress. We can all become upset and tetchy when stressed, toddlers don't have the same strategies for expressing stress as older children or adults have. In these situations, they are not able to find a better way to express themselves and their needs, especially if they have not learned about turn-taking and sharing, and may hit-out or bite even though they do not necessarily mean harm.

### **Controlling**

For some children biting adults or other children is a way that they have learnt to take control of the situation. It may be in a situation where different children are jostling to control a group or it may be a more entrenched behavioural response stop this usually happens within the older toddler groups and is unusual. Parents or preschool staff may need to seek some professional help in these very rare cases.

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If you still have concerns about your child and a biting incident, then you can get further advice from Charles Ward.

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