How to Help Your Child Stop Biting

It is very common for a child to bite others at some point during their early years. When children do not have the skills or vocabulary to express their feelings, they might engage in a behavior, such as biting, as a way to let you know how they feel. Children might bite for a variety of reasons:

- **Frustration** – she might bite because she wants her toy back or because her sister is sitting too close to her.
- **Lack of play skills** – she might bite because she feels overwhelmed by the proximity of other children or expectation to share toys.
- **Attention** – she might bite because biting causes a big reaction from adults. Biting can result in adults interacting with the child or gaining the adult’s attention.
- **Teething** – she might bite to relieve pain from new teeth coming in.
- **Overwhelming emotions** – she might bite because she does not know how to express emotions when she is hungry, tired, scared or anxious.

The important thing for you to remember when biting occurs is to stay calm with your actions and words and first try to figure out the reason WHY the biting happened. For example, if your child bites you when your attention is focused on another person in the room, you might think your child bit you to get your attention. Once you understand the reasons why your child bites, you can teach her a new way to express her feelings or requests during situations when she is likely to bite. It takes time, patience and repeated practice, but once she has mastered the skills needed to appropriately express her feelings, biting and other challenging behaviors will decrease.

### Practice at School

When a child bites at school, teachers immediately help the child who has been hurt. By first attending to the hurt child, teachers are not giving attention to the child who bit. This lets the child who bit know that if she wants to get someone’s attention, this way did not work. Teachers also include the child who bit in caring for the hurt child as much as possible. They may include letting her get an ice pack, carry a bandage, offer a hug, hold his hand or bring him a stuffed animal. By including her, she is seeing the result of her actions, learning how to solve problems and help friends. After the situation has calmed down, teachers might talk about what happened and offer ideas on what she can do the next time she feels like biting. Teachers might also put books in the library about biting to read.

### The Bottom Line

Biting is a common behavior for very young children, but one that must be addressed immediately. Children might bite when they feel overwhelmed by an emotion and do not have the words or skills to tell someone or ask for help. Parents can watch and learn when their child is likely to bite (during play dates with friends, when left alone with a sibling, when teething, etc.) and then teach their child a new skill to replace the biting behavior.