

Help Sheet

0 – 25 Specialist Teaching And Support Service

How to prevent children from biting.



Why?

- These strategies support children who bite.
- This is beneficial because understanding why children bite is key to stopping the problem.
- Biting is another form of communication.

You will need:

- An adult to spend time with the child.
- A tailor made response.

How?

Observe and Plan

Observe how intense, how frequent and what the triggers are for biting. A child may bite due to:

- **emerging language skills** which mean that they are unable to express needs or strong feelings e.g. 'I'm cross with you' or 'You are standing too close to me'
- **being overwhelmed** by sounds, light, smells, close proximity of others etc
- **experimenting** to see what will happen
- **being over-tired**
- **teething**
- **a need for oral stimulation**

Try to act before the child has the chance to bite by removing the person who they are about to bite. Avoid triggers and plan in advance for their behaviour. Children often clench their teeth before they bite. If you see this sign, take the child somewhere quiet to calm down. If a teething child is trying out his or her teeth, find toys they can safely chew on.

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Teach them it's wrong - When the child bites, use simple but firm words. Try, "that's biting, that's wrong" or a firm "no".

Teach them to express themselves - Try to help the child find a less painful way to express their feelings. If the child is expressing affection, teach them to hug rather than bite whenever they feel strong emotions. Likewise, if the child bites out of defence, show them how to tell somebody they don't want him or her too close e.g. say "stop" and hold their hand up to make the 'stop' sign.

Reduce the effectiveness – When a child bites to gain attention, give a firm "no". Don't try to reason or explain. Put your body between victim and biter and turn your back on the biter. Give the victim sympathy and the biter a clear message that this is an unproductive way of getting attention.

Praise them for good behaviour – When you observe the child behaving well be generous with your praise. Be specific e.g. "you are being kind and gentle to your friend?".

Stick with it - Ensure everyone working with the child is consistent.

Give clear commands and be positive - Try not to raise your voice and speak in a firm voice. Don't overdo explanations. The first bite may be impulsive, but a child can soon learn that they get an enormous amount of attention when they bite. If they continue to bite, don't go into why it's wrong, just say 'that's biting, that's wrong' or 'no'. If possible, use a visual alongside spoken language.

Reference / Evidence base – informed by: