

Biters:

<http://www.parentlinkalberta.ca/publish/606.htm#>

Why they do it and what to do about it.

Although biting isn't "abnormal", one out of every ten toddlers exhibits this disturbing and potentially harmful behaviour. Young children may bite for different reasons, and they may not all respond to the same types of intervention. Identifying the kind of biter you're dealing with, will help you develop an appropriate discipline technique.

The Experimental Biter

An infant may take an experimental bite out of caregiver's shoulder. When this occurs, use prompt, clear signals to communicate that they must not bite. "No", said sharply, would be a good response.

These experimental biters may simply want to touch, smell and taste other people in order to learn more about their world. Their muscles are developing, and they need to experiment. Provide them with a variety of toys and stimulation to encourage this stage of development. Teething pain may also be motivating them to bite.

The Frustrated Biter

Some biters lack the skills to cope with situations such as the desire for adult attention or another child's toy. You may help the frustrated biter by teaching them appropriate language to show their feelings and/or get what they need. Give lots of positive reinforcement for good communication and behaviour. Also, watch for signs of rising frustration. Spotting potential conflict may help you avoid a potentially harmful incident.

The Threatened Biter

Some children bite in self-defence. They may become overwhelmed by their surroundings and/or new family situations. They bite as a means of regaining control. These children may require additional nurturing. The bond between child and caregivers should be warm and reassuring.

The Power Biter

Some children have a strong need for personal power and control. As soon as they see the response they get from biting, the behaviour is strongly reinforced. Throughout the day give the biter choices and reinforce positive behaviour (like sharing and saying please). Filling the day with positive attention when the child is not biting, will lessen aggressive behaviour.

Parents and caregivers must work as a team with a consistent approach for the child. Take time to look for problems in the biter's emotional state and environment. Is the biter exhausted or hungry? Does the child bite the same individual? Intervene immediately, but carefully. Always treat biting as a serious matter. Look your child straight in the eye, and use a firm voice to say a sharp 'No'!

Teaching children age-appropriate ways to control themselves encourages the development of confidence and self-esteem. We can guide children towards self-control and away from biting.

Adapted from the National Association for the Education of Young Children