

Biting: why children do it and what Little Pioneers does to help

When a biting incident occurs, it's only natural to react with strong emotions. You know your toddler is generous, loving and happy at heart. So it can be quite shocking (and painful) if they suddenly use their teeth for something other than eating. And it's common to feel a bit defensive or ashamed, especially if the biting occurs in public.

However, try to keep in mind that 1/4 of all toddlers will bite others at some point. And your kind, caring toddler is still just that. They aren't trying to intentionally hurt anyone. Typically, they're just responding to an emotion or situation they don't know how to handle quite yet.

Why does biting occur?

Sometimes, a child bites because they're...

- Expressing emotion. This could be any sort of intense feeling, either positive or negative, that they just don't know how to put into words.
- Experimenting. If your child's teething, they'll often put things in their mouth to help ease the pain. Or just so they can explore the new object.
- Defending. Maybe another child is sitting too close to them or wants a turn with their toy, but they're not quite ready to share and don't know what else to do.
- Controlling. A child may use biting as a way to get others to do what they want. Or if they've bitten in the past and gotten lots of attention after (even if it's negative), they may repeat the behaviour to see if they get the same result.
- Dealing with a new stressor. A new little sibling? Moving to a new home? Parent starting a new job? All of these big life events can be hard for a child to process emotionally, causing them to react in other ways, like biting.

What to do if your child bites

No matter what happens or where you are, do your best to keep your temper and never retaliate. Explain to your child that what they're doing is wrong with a firm, matter of fact "No", "Biting hurts" or "Biting is never okay". Your child may feel upset after they bite so make sure you show them lots of love, support and understanding. But if you think your child is biting as a way to get adult attention, be firm but try not to make it a bigger deal than it is. Or they might associate biting with even more attention in the future.

It's also important to help the child who has been bitten. Make sure both children are safe by separating them and then checking to make sure the bite doesn't require medical attention.

How to prevent it from happening again

Once the incident has passed, try to think back and see if you can spot any patterns. Does the biting happen with particular people? In certain spots? At the same time of day? This can help you anticipate future incidents and help the child avoid triggers, like feeling overwhelmed, tired or hungry.

And spend time teaching your child other ways to express themselves. If they're feeling a strong, positive emotion, teach them that a good hug will do the trick. Or if they're feeling frustrated, have them put up their hand and say "Stop" instead of biting. And if they're feeling overwhelmed or just don't know what to do, teach your child that talking to a trusted adult, like you or their nursery practitioner, is always a good idea.

How Little Pioneers help

At nursery, we promise that your child isn't the first one who has used their teeth and won't be the last. So we're experienced at handling even the most challenging of cases. And have procedures to make sure both the child who bites and the child who is bitten are comforted and supported. This includes providing a thorough review of what happened with the children and their parents. And for confidentiality purposes and to avoid possible conflict with this sensitive issue, the name of the child who has bitten will not be disclosed to the parents.

No matter what, try to be patient. Learning how to redirect emotion in a more positive manner can take time. But we're here to help every step of the way.