

OUCH! WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN YOUR TODDLER BITES?



Dear Parents and Caregivers,

It can be hard to know what to do when your toddler or young child bites. You might feel embarrassed, mad, or worried. It is okay to have these feelings. The **Early Connections team** wants you to know that many children bite, and there are ways to help them stop.

Why do toddlers bite?

Toddlers bite for many reasons. Sometimes they are mad or they don't know how to say how they feel. Young children are still learning how to talk about their wants, needs, and feelings. They often use things like eye contact, pointing, sounds, crying, or short phrases to tell us what they need. Sometimes, they bite instead when they don't know the right words yet.

Here are some common reasons why toddlers bite:

- Their gums hurt from teething
- They want to chew on something
- They don't know how to say what they are feeling
- They feel scared, sad, tired, or mad
- They want attention or playtime
- They feel excited or full of energy

What to do if your child bites

- **Use clear, simple words.** Speak in a calm and clear voice. You can say, "*Ouch, biting hurts,*" and let your child know that it's not okay.
- **Care for the other person.** If your child bites someone else, say, "*Biting hurts.*" Then give care and attention to the child who was bitten. This helps teach kindness.
- **Do not shame or yell.** Don't yell, scare, or shame your child. This might scare or confuse your child. Also, try not to laugh. This might make your child think biting is a game or a way to get attention.



TIPS FOR PARENTS

Before biting happens:

- **Watch closely.** Watch what is going on before, during, and after your child bites. Look at how your child is feeling. Note what time of day it is. Check what is going on around your child—is it loud or busy? Are they tired? Are they feeling sick?
- **Plan ahead.** Try to keep a regular schedule or routine for sleep, eating, and playing.
- **Distract and redirect.** If you see signs that your child might bite, give them a toy, start a new activity, or talk to them.
- **Talk with other caregivers.** Make sure anyone else caring for your child knows what to do if biting happens.
- **Use books and tools.** Read books or use simple videos about biting to help your child learn that it's not okay.



Songs to teach children about biting

- **“No Biting” by The Kiboomers**
Helps children use words instead of biting
www.socialworkerstoolbox.com/teeth-are-not-for-biting-storybook-no-biting-videos-for-children
- **“No Biting” by Yo Gabba Gabba!**
Muno learns how to treat friends kindly.
bit.ly/44IRtYy
- **“Biting Hurts” by Jack Hartmann**
Teaches children that biting is for food, not for hurting others.
www.socialworkerstoolbox.com/teeth-are-not-for-biting-storybook-no-biting-videos-for-children

Stories to teach children about biting

- **Teeth Are Not for Biting** by Elizabeth Verdick
- **Little Dinos Don’t Bite** by Michael Dahl
- **People Don’t Bite People** by Lisa Wheeler
- **No Biting!** by Karen Katz
- **Bootsie Barker Bites** by Barbara Bottner
- **Doodle Bites** by Polly Dunbar

Where can I find online resources for more support?



Responding to Your Child's Bite

The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning at Vanderbilt University
bit.ly/44YnAVt



Toddler Biting: Finding the Right Response

Zero to Three
www.zerotothree.org/resource/toddler-biting-finding-the-right-response/



Understanding and Responding to Children Who Bite

National Association for the Education of Young Children
www.naeyc.org/our-work/families/understanding-and-responding-children-who-bite

Things to keep in mind

Biting is common. Your child is going through different stages of growth. They are still learning how to handle big feelings. If biting keeps happening, talk with your child’s doctor, childcare provider, or a mental health provider.

You are not alone! With love and support, your child will learn better ways to express themselves.



STEIN TIKUN OLAM EARLY CONNECTIONS PROGRAM CHILDREN’S HOSPITAL LOS ANGELES

4650 Sunset Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90027 • CHLA.org