

## FACT SHEET

# American Academy of Pediatrics



DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN™

## BITING

### Pennsylvania Chapter

#### ***Why do children bite?***

Many infants and toddlers bite other people. Young children have trouble taking another person's point of view. They may not realize that biting will hurt. Biting can occur for a variety of reasons. Here are some reasons to consider. You may not always discover the reason that a child bit another child or adult.

- Anger
- Frustration
- Too much stimulation or activity
- Not enough adult/child interaction
- Imitation of behavior
- Confusion
- Reaction ("Someone will fuss if I bite.")
- Avoidance of a task
- Lack of words
- Tired
- To gain access to something denied
- Hunger
- Child has oral motor needs
- Fear
- Sadness
- Not enough activity
- Attention seeking
- Noisy environment
- Curiosity ("What will it feel like?")
- Difficulty waiting for a turn
- Teething

#### ***What can parents and early education and child care providers do when biting occurs?***

- Remain calm. Do not bite back. Children need positive role models to learn self-control.
- Use simple statements "Stop. Biting hurts." "We bite food, not people."
- Separate the child who bit from the child who was bitten. The child who bit may be given a "time-out" using approximately one minute for each year of the child's age.
- Give immediate attention and comfort to the hurting child. Help this child to express that he/she does not like to be bitten. Encourage the child to communicate these feelings directly to the biter. Model appropriate responses, such as, "I don't like it when you bite me". Do not allow or encourage the child who was bitten to bite back.
- Clean the wound with soap and water. A health care professional should evaluate bite marks that break the skin.
- Make a written notation of what happened before, during, and after the incident. Refer to the factors listed above and evaluate what factors may have contributed to or led up to the biting situation.
- Notify the parent/legal guardian of the child who was bitten about the incident. Do not identify the biter.
- Notify the parent of the biter if this behavior is habitual, severe, or could cause social concerns among the parents. Reassure the parents that the early education and child care staff have handled the situation. They do not need to discipline the child further.
- Remove potentially dangerous objects from the environment of a child who bites to prevent injury. For example, remove electrical cords that, if bitten, could cause mouth burns.

### ***What can parents and early education and child care providers do to prevent biting?***

- Maintain a structured, well-planned environment.
- Provide teething toys for children who experiment with biting.
- Provide plenty of positive attention for appropriate behavior.
- Stay physically close to the children.
- Intervene early before conflict between children occurs.
- Use diversion tactics to redirect a child to more acceptable behaviors before biting occurs. For example, engage children in play or offer another toy when they are getting angry with friends for not sharing.
- Help children to identify their feelings.
- Foster appropriate communication skills among the children. Model for them how to express their emotions. Give children examples of words they can use. For example, suggest that the child say, "It makes me angry when you take my toy."
- Provide many positive reinforcements such as verbal praise, eye contact, smiles and physical contact for appropriate interactions.

### ***What can parents and early education and child care providers do if a child bites repeatedly?***

Most of the time, biting is a rare event. Children learn quickly that biting is not acceptable. If a child begins to bite repetitively, consider all the factors that might be causing the problem. Document the times and situations when the biting occurs. Use the ECELS [Behavioral Data Collection Sheet](#) found at the ECELS website. Try to determine if there is a pattern. Patterns in behavior may provide information about environment triggers. Watch closely; be prepared to intervene and provide environmental support to prevent future biting.

The children who are of greatest concern are children who bite frequently, present significant risk to others, or show developmental delays or behavior problems. In these cases, please discuss the issues with the child's parents/legal guardians and refer the child for a future assessment of development and behavior.

For additional information, see

American Academy of Pediatrics, American Public Health Association, National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education. 2011. [Caring for our children: National health and safety performance standards: Guidelines for early care and education programs](#). 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics; Washington, DC: American Public Health Association. Standard 2.2.0.7: Handling Physical Aggression, Biting and Hitting. Also available at <http://nrckids.org>

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