

Biting

“Stressed Toddlers BITE”

Biting is the one thing we have in common with animals. When the brain downshifts into the survival state, the primitive instinct kicks in. Biting IS NOT a learned response. Biting is a PRIMITVE response to fear.

Biting Action Plan

1. Try to locate stressors in the toddler’s life.
 - a. Not enough structure
 - b. Too much structure
 - c. Not enough rest
 - d. Eating
 - e. Potty habits
 - f. Connections
 - g. Attunement
2. Start a stress reduction program at home and school.
 - a. More touching (skin to skin), body massage games.
 - b. More rituals and routines with attuned interactions.
 - c. Chest and lap time while using calming techniques.
 - d. More visual schedules.
3. Shadowing and teething necklace: There is nothing you can do to help a child learn other ways of getting his or her needs met AFTER the bite has occurred. You must catch the child before the bite. Most bites occur during transition or non-structured time.
4. Demonstrate and practice empathy and attunement. Give the child the words needed to express themselves and their needs.
5. Empower the victim, even non-verbal children.

After the age of three, children usually bite when they feel powerless or scared, such as when they are losing a fight or think that they are going to be hurt by another person. Children older than three who frequently bite other people may need to be seen by a doctor. This type of biting may be a sign that a child has problems with expressing feelings or self-control.

BITING CHEAT SHEET

	5-7 months	8-13 months	15-36 months	4+
Why	Teething or discomfort around the mouth	Over excited	Stressed, frustrated, as a strategy to get something, often during transitions	Early stressor, tantrums
Who	Caregivers	Caregivers or child nearby	Children	Children or self
What to Do	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teething rings • Overreact to bite with face and sounds (OUCH!) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overreact with “ouch” and face “Biting hurts” • Teaching self-regulation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Locate and reduce stressors • Start stress reduction program, secure transition • Shadow to interfere • Use biting intervention strategy 	Seek professional help
Message	“My mouth hurts. HELP!”	“I’m so excited. I’m over aroused. HELP!”	“I know no other way to get what I want or express myself. HELP!”	“The rhythm in my brain is way off. HELP!”