

Tips for Parents



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Parenting.
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Biting

(suitable for 6 months – 3 years)

As young children develop, they will most probably put things in their mouth or bite others. Most children go through a phase where they will bite another child or adult. They do not understand that they will hurt someone if they bite.

Children usually move on from biting. As your child develops they will learn the words and skills to express their feelings.



Your child might bite because they are:

- teething;
- exploring things and people – babies and toddlers use their mouths to explore;
- frustrated, excited or angry and don't have the words to express themselves;
- seeking connection from an adult;
- over tired;
- responding to another child's aggressive behaviour;
- copying others;
- worried or anxious about a change in their life like a new baby or house move; or
- interested in the reaction they get and don't understand it causes pain.

You can respond by:

- **Being calm.** Don't react or bite your toddler back. This will hurt your child and give them the wrong message that this behaviour is OK.
- **Do not smack or physically punish.** This is illegal in Wales. You might think it will stop the behaviour but it doesn't respond to your child's needs, or help them learn how to understand their emotions and develop more control over their behaviours.

- **Being curious about why your child has bitten** and making a connection with them.
- **Offering them something else to bite** – for example a teething toy.
- **Offering correction.** Calmly let your child know it's not OK to bite people.
- **Reconnecting with your child** – for example giving them a hug or reading a story together.
- **Praising your child when you see them being kind to you, another child or an adult.** They will learn this is the behaviour you want to see.

Top tips to help with biting:

- **Have lots of safe objects for biting** – for example teething rings or crunchy snacks (like plain crackers, carrot sticks or apple pieces).
- **Try to anticipate trouble** – move your child before they bite.
- **Give your child some simple choices** – for example “*red top or blue top?*”, “*apple or banana?*” will give them a sense of control. This may help reduce biting.
- **Help your child express their feelings** – name your child's feelings when you observe them, for example when you see that they are happy, sad, cross, disappointed or frustrated. It will help them learn the word for that feeling or emotion so in time they are able to learn to express how they feel.
- **Make time for active play every day** – go to the park, play in the garden or put some music on and dance.
- **Try to avoid stressful activities or places** where there will be lots of other children on days when your child is very tired.

Biting can be upsetting and stressful for adults, but for young children it is usually appropriate at this stage of their development. If you are concerned in any way speak to your Health Visitor. They are there to support you and can provide advice and assistance.

Where to get advice and support

Universal parenting support and advice is provided by midwives, health visitors, GPs and your local authority. Early help programmes such as Flying Start (if you live in a Flying Start area) and Families First are also available.

Look after yourself. Meeting up with other parents can be great for your wellbeing. Your local **Family Information Service (www.fis.wales)** will be able to tell you what's on in your area.

For positive parenting tips and expert advice, visit: gov.wales/giveittime

