



CHILDREN'S
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SOCIETY OF
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Family Education Program materials and podcasts, and information on CHS programs can also be found on our website at www.chs-ca.org.



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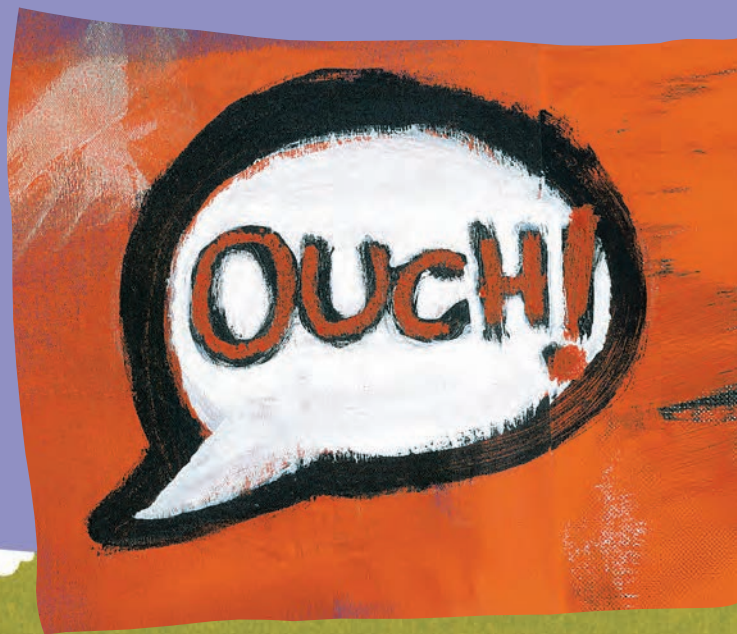
C H I L D R E N ' S H O M E S O C I E T Y O F C A L I F O R N I A

WHEN A CHILD BITES

UNDERSTANDING WHY AND WHAT TO DO



When a child bites or is bitten, a strong emotional response is sure to follow. Children and adults alike may experience overwhelming feelings of fear, anger, frustration, and guilt. Biting by a child of any age cannot be tolerated. It is not safe, socially acceptable, or helpful in creating a positive environment for children. And most of all — biting hurts!





★ CHILDREN MAY BITE FOR A VARIETY OF REASONS ★

REASON

SOLUTION

TEETHING

When gums are sore and swollen, biting can feel good.

Offer the child a teething biscuit, firm rubber teething ring, or a frozen bagel.

ATTENTION-SEEKING

Young children may try a variety of ways to gain attention, including biting.

Give the child attention when he is not biting, so that he is less likely to bite to gain attention.

POWER/AGGRESSION

When children experience a need for power and control, they may bite other children, and the reaction only reinforces the biter's behavior.

Share acceptable ways to interact with others. Encourage positive social behavior like sharing or waiting turns.

TERRITORIAL/DEFENSE

A child may bite when he feels threatened. He may be trying to protect his play space, toys, and himself from overwhelming surroundings.

Comfort the child and let him know that he is safe. Make sure that the area is not too crowded and there is ample space and toys.

FRUSTRATION/STRESS

Unable to express her intense feelings with words, biting may occur. A move, divorce, or new sibling can cause feelings of frustration and stress.

Be aware of signs that show rising frustration. Teach her ways to show her feelings appropriately and praise her when she communicates properly.

WHY DO CHILDREN BITE?

Most biting occurs among toddlers who have limited language skills or ways to express their feelings. Preschoolers, too, may occasionally bite when they have become so frustrated or overly tired that they have lost all control. Pressures to keep pace with a hurried adult world can be very stressful for young children. They often need more time than adults allow to move from one activity or setting to another: home to child care, dinnertime to bedtime. Also, intense play such as tickling or wrestling for an extended time can overwhelm children and lead them to bite.





★ ACTIONS TO TAKE

When a child bites, adults must intervene quickly, calmly, and firmly. Most often, a child bites because he is out of control, which is very frightening to him. Parents and caregivers can help children the most by staying in control themselves. Reassure both the child who bit and the victim. If possible, keep both children by your side as you inspect and wash the bitten area with warm, soapy water. This way, you are demonstrating the consequences and the seriousness of the behavior.

Young children may not understand that biting hurts. Make sure the children understand that biting cannot be allowed and that you will stop it every time. A child who is out of control and frightened by his own behavior needs to know that adults will help take control until he is able to control himself.

- Encourage – but do not force – the child to comfort the victim with words, hugs, or pats. Demonstrate that gentleness and kindness are expected.
- Assess what led to the biting and teach the children alternative actions. Give the children words they can use to ask to have a turn with a toy such as, “Can I have that next?” or, “It is my turn now.” Suggest acceptable ways a child might express his anger or frustration such as pounding some clay or drawing a picture.



★ WAYS TO DISCOURAGE BITING

- Evaluate the children’s environment to make sure there is ample space, equipment, and toys to keep all the children occupied and to minimize having to wait turns.
- Avoid overstimulation for a child who becomes easily frustrated. Keep groups small and make play periods shorter with less challenging activities.
- Increase adult supervision to intervene before frustration levels rise.
- Teach cooperation throughout the day, demonstrating words and phrases children can use to express their desires and feelings. Praise cooperative behavior.
- Familiarize yourself with the child’s signals of rising frustration or anger.
- Be aware of the child’s current situation. Does a parent have a new job or exams at school? Is there a loss or an addition to the family? Evaluating what a child is experiencing helps in understanding what a child may need so that she does not resort to biting.

Never encourage a child to bite back and never bite a child to show that it hurts! Your message should always be clear and simple: biting is never acceptable for anyone.

TO LEARN MORE

BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

NO BITING!

Karen Katz

TEETH ARE NOT FOR BITING

Elizabeth Verdick, illustrated by Marieka Heinlen

BOOKS FOR ADULTS

BECOMING THE PARENT YOU WANT TO BE

Laura Davis & Janis Keyser

ORGANIZATIONS

THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS

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