

# Children biting

Biting is a normal phase of many young children's development. It can hurt and cause distress for whoever is bitten but there are not usually any health risks. It can also upset or frighten the child who bites if they have hurt someone.

There are a number of reasons why children bite, including to express big feelings. Children need to feel loved and secure and know that feelings can be managed. Parents can play a positive role in supporting them to learn this skill.

## What causes biting?

**Exploration:** Babies often bite as part of exploring their environment. It can also be an attempt to communicate until they can express their feelings in words. Many babies will try biting the breast when feeding, or a parent or carer.

It can help to:

- say calmly and firmly 'No! Biting hurts.'  
Remove them quickly from whatever they are biting. Give teething children things they can safely bite on, eg teething rings.

**Frustration:** Most children under three have not yet learned to play cooperatively, control their impulses or deal with frustration. If another child takes their toy they may respond by biting or hitting.

It can help to:

- supervise children closely



- keep group play to short times and small groups. Distract children who might want the same toy
- redirect young children away from the situation. They need you to understand their feelings and your help to manage them.

**Being the youngest child:** Sometimes a younger child may see biting as a way to feel more equal in play with older siblings.

It can help to:

- get older children's help to make them feel more equal and ensure each child's needs are met
- make separate play places for older and younger children if needed
- acknowledge how a child who has already bitten might be feeling. Tell them biting hurts and is not OK. Keep them with you for a while and show them other ways to respond.

**Emotional stress:** When a child is emotionally stressed they may show their feelings by biting. Young children don't know what they are feeling - they just act!

It can help to:

- plan ahead to avoid situations where your child might bite. Routinely offer as much love and affection as you can to help them feel secure
- reduce tension in their bodies, eg support them to have a good cry when they need to, find ways to get them laughing, do soothing activities. Consistent routines help too
- teach children who have enough words how to protect their space, eg holding out their arms and saying 'Please move away' or asking them 'What can we do to stop Anna taking your toy? What other toy could you give her to play with?'
- ask other parents/caregivers to support your strategies
- teach children other ways to express their feelings, eg through play and stories.  
Encourage positive behaviour, eg 'I really like the way you used your words to tell your sister you're still playing with that toy'
- take regular time to play and have fun together. They are less likely to bite to get your attention.

## The child who is bitten

- It is important to comfort the child who is bitten but not to overreact. Encourage their quick return to play. Help older children find ways to protect themselves that don't hurt the child who has bitten. Adults need to make sure younger children are kept safe.
- Sometimes parents may be concerned that biting could transfer a disease. While a bite can leave a bruise, the skin is not usually broken so viruses or bacteria can't enter the child's body.
- Some parents may expect a child who has bitten at childcare to be excluded. What is more helpful in the long term is for the centre to provide specific support for the child who has bitten and make sure other children are protected.

**Whatever the cause of the biting respond quickly and firmly, without anger or overreacting. Remove the child from the situation. If they are upset or distressed comfort and help them calm before helping them learn other ways to express their feelings.**



If you have any concerns talk to your GP or visit the Child and Family Health Service (CaFHS) – book an appointment on 1300 733 606.

Note: The term 'Parents' in this Guide refers to anyone caring for and/or raising children and young people.

## Want more information?

Scan the QR Code to see the full version of this Parent Easy Guide.



**Parenting SA**

A partnership between the Department of Human Services and the Women's and Children's Health Network.

[www.parenting.sa.gov.au](http://www.parenting.sa.gov.au)

Parent Easy Guides are free in South Australia.

Important: This information is not intended to replace advice from a qualified practitioner.

© Government of South Australia. Revised:02/2025