

KEYS TO GREAT PARENTING



Fun and
Learning
with Your
Baby or Toddler

HANDLING BITING WITH TODDLERS

As parents we often feel highly disturbed when our toddler bites another child or is bitten by one. How can we as parents handle biting with calmness and self-control? Here are some ideas that may help us keep our cool when the situation heats up.

What are some of the reasons why toddlers may feel the need to bite?

- ◆ Toddlers are learning all kinds of things at a more rapid pace than at any future time.
 - They are just learning that some items belong to them.
 - Sometimes they don't understand that things that they want belong to someone else.
 - They are just learning to take turns and to share.
 - They are just learning to use language. They may not be able to put words on their desires, needs, and strong feelings.
- ◆ Toddlers have difficulty waiting for things that they want or need; they may grab, push, or bite in frustration.
- ◆ Toddlers have limited understanding of other peoples' feelings. They can see that when they solve their problems by biting, people get angry and sometimes cry. However, it's hard for young children to put themselves in another person's place.

How can we teach them that biting is unacceptable?

- ◆ *Be a detective!* Ask yourself, "Why did this child bite?" Then try to understand the biter's point of view—he or she had a reason for biting. The reason as you understand it will likely determine how you handle the situation.
- ◆ *Questions to ask yourself to solve the problem may include:*
When and where did the biting happen? What happened just before the biting occurred? Did the biter first try other ways to communicate without success? Who else was involved? What did the biter want or need? What do you think the biter was feeling just before, during, and after the biting occurred?
- ◆ *Look for patterns in this and other biting incidents.* What about the time of day, particular recurring circumstances such as hunger, tiredness, extra noise, or a brother or sister's toy grabbing, etc.?
- ◆ *Be firm and consistent in your behavior each time that biting occurs.*
 - ✓ Immediately console and give first aid to the child who was bitten.
 - ✓ Then, remove the biter from the scene to regain self-control if necessary. Say sternly, "It hurts Sarah when you bite her." "I don't like it when you bite."
 - ✓ Encourage the victim to tell the biter his or her feelings of hurt and anger.

- ◆ *Avoid telling the biter that he or she is bad.* Separate the biting behavior from the whole child.
- ◆ *Do not ever bite the child who has bitten.* Doing so only tells a toddler that you have hurt him or her and damages his or her trust in you.

Teaching toddlers better ways than biting to solve problems.

Ask yourself, "Knowing what I do now, what can I do to keep the biting from happening again?"

- ✓ Make sure the toddler is able to reach most of the things he or she needs and wants.
- ✓ Give the biter words to use to express his or her feelings—repeat the words often.
- ✓ Stay close by to provide a reassuring presence for your toddler when frustration might occur.
- ✓ Prevent trouble by rearranging the play area or the family schedule, whenever possible.
- ✓ Change the daily patterns that cause the toddler's strong feelings.
- ✓ Point out to the toddler the positive, helpful behavior he or she shows. Self-confidence increases!

Source: Legg, J. (1993). "What's a little biting among friends?" Child Care Information Exchange (92), July-Aug., 41-43.