



Summary

A bite-free toddler environment simply does not exist. Toddlers and infants are trying to tell us things through their biting – it is our responsibility to listen. When biting occurs we are all challenged to maintain a broader perspective and pull together to help our little ones grow into the people they are struggling to become.

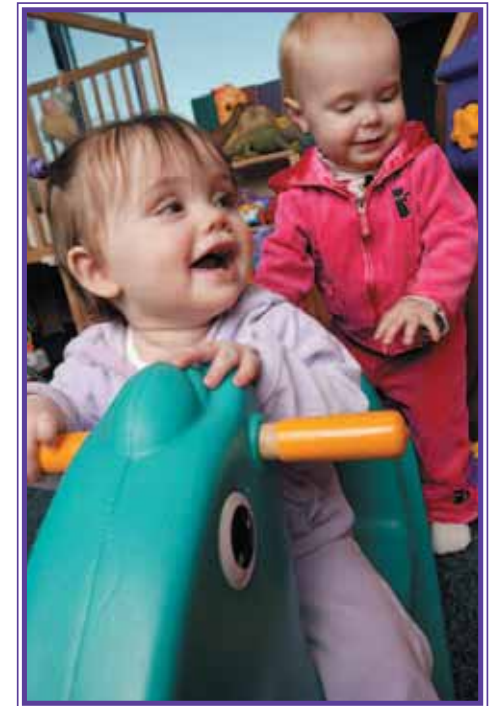
Reference: Jim Greenman & Anne Stonehouse, *Prime Times: A Handbook for Excellence in Infant and Toddler Programs*, Redleaf Press.



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When Little Ones Bite



**Why Children Bite: Teething, New Changes,
Frustration, Overstimulation, and Attention**



Even in the best child care programs, periodic biting occurs among infants and toddlers, and sometimes even among preschoolers. Biters strike with lightning speed, even when caregivers are vigilant. Biting is a normal developmental stage of childhood. It is also one of the most

difficult. Biting is a natural consequence of young children in group care who are still learning language, social skills, and appropriate methods of communication. However unfortunate, it is a common childhood phenomenon, and not something to blame on children, families, or caregivers. There are no quick and easy solutions. Kids Quest takes this issue very seriously and will work as a team with parents and children to overcome biting incidents together.

Why Children Bite:

- 1. Teething.** Young children with erupting teeth will often bite or chew to relieve sore and tender gums.
- 2. New Changes.** Biting is not unusual after the birth of a sibling. Other situations such as first entering the child care setting, a divorce, or a move to a new home may evoke the same response.
- 3. Exploration of Texture and Taste.** Infants and toddlers are in a very oral stage in their development. They use their mouths as a means of learning about their environment. Most things they encounter are brought directly to the mouth to be explored further – even people.
- 4. Satisfaction.** Young children receive satisfaction from bottles, pacifiers, thumbs, etc. and have difficulty distinguishing the difference between the satisfactions of this and biting.

5. Cause and Effect. Toddlers are fascinated with the power they feel when they act upon their environment and can see obvious effects. They hurl bottles off high chairs, flip light switches on and off, flush toilets continually, and yes, bite their friends. What a result: children cry, people make a fuss, everyone runs around – there is a great commotion!

6. Frustration. Probably the most common reason for biting behavior is the need to express anger and frustration. Toddlers lack the needed skills to deal effectively with the anxiety they experience. Biting is a simple way to get a toy back from another, or make an unwanted classmate go away.

7. Overstimulation. Children do not need to be in a negative mood in order to bite. For many little ones, being ecstatic or extremely excited elicits a bite because they cannot yet control the intensity of their emotional state.

8. The Need for Attention. Toddlers have an endless need for attention. Even negative attention can be reinforcing and make a child feel important.

What Kids Quest Does to Manage Biting:

- 1.** We try to minimize stress in our children by giving them attention, affection, and praise. We provide opportunities for peaceful activities (including a nap time) and provide sensory experiences.
- 2.** When a child is bitten, we avoid any immediate response that reinforces the biting. The biter is immediately removed with no show of emotion. Caring attention is focused on the bitten child, and caregivers will administer appropriate first aid. While addressing the child who did the biting, the caregiver firmly states that biting hurts their friends and is not okay.

3. We look at the circumstances surrounding each biting incident. Was there crowding, overstimulation, a struggle over toys, too much waiting, or other frustration? Did it occur at the time of day when children could be especially hungry or tired? Are children receiving plenty of positive feedback and attention for their appropriate behavior?

4. We work with each child who exhibits biting behavior on using appropriate social skills: resolving conflicts, expressing feelings, and using words.

5. We make special efforts to protect potential victims.

6. It is Kids Quest's policy to keep the names of biters and victims confidential. Most regulations require us to do so, and releasing names serves no useful purpose and can make an already difficult situation even more difficult.

Balancing Commitments to All Our Children



Some children become “stuck” in biting patterns for a time, and it can be frustrating to the parents of victims that we are unable to “fix” the child quickly or terminate care. We try to make every effort to extinguish the behavior, and to balance our commitment to the family of the biting child with that of other families.

Neither delayed punishment at home, which a child will not understand, nor punishment at the center, helps stop biting. Unfortunately, there is no quick fix or magic solution. What does work are immediate and logical consequences; being deprived of what the biter initially sought; social skills training; love and attention; possible environmental changes; and time.