



Helping Hands Christian Learning Center

"Let Us Make a Difference in Your Child's Life"

"She Bit Me First!"

As a parent, it may be embarrassing to be told that your child is guilty of biting another child. A parent's first reaction is sometimes disbelief: "No, my sweet child wouldn't do such a thing!" This can be followed by shock and horror, "What kind of savage has my child become, biting another human being?" The reaction of the parent whose child has been bitten is usually no less dramatic, "I can still see the marks of that monster's teeth."

If you question your own child about the matter, you may be told, "She bit me first." It's generally not helpful to take sides or try to determine who really "started it" or who first said what to whom. **It's better to make it perfectly clear, in a no-nonsense tone of voice, that biting another person is never acceptable under any circumstance.**

Biting behavior usually peaks between two and three years of age and then starts to decline as verbal abilities improve.

To stop biting behavior, it's not enough to treat the symptoms without dealing with the underlying causes. Childcare experts understand that at two years of age, a child does not yet know how to control her feelings when she gets over-excited, angry, or frustrated. So, she may hit, kick or bite the child who upsets her. All normal children experience feelings of anger, frustration, and aggression at some time. They must learn to control these impulses in order to avoid aggressive behavior.

How then do you stop your child from biting? Here are some recommendations:

Provide closer supervision. The child who bites other children needs more structure and supervision. The person who supervises must watch for signs of anger, frustration, or tiredness which often precede biting behavior.

Intervene early. Many children's problems can be better controlled or prevented by early intervention. For example, if you see the child who bites being teased or provoked, don't wait for trouble to occur. Separate the children from one another as soon as possible.

Reprimand calmly but firmly. Whenever one child bites another, it is important to reprimand as calmly and firmly as possible: "You must never bite another child. That hurts her." Then quietly take the child to another part of the room to settle down and get her under control. If she continues to yell or scream, it is best to ignore these behaviors as much as possible, unless, of course, you think she will do some damage. She will usually calm down in about ten to fifteen minutes.

Teach her alternative behaviors. In dealing with her feelings of anger or frustration, she must ultimately learn to express her feelings verbally rather than physically. That is a skill that will need much practice. It is also one which will usually improve as children get older and can better express themselves verbally.

In general, thoughtful management of the problem, rather than severe punishment, will improve the likelihood of changing the child's behavior.

In summary, among normal two-year-olds, most cases of biting are due to the child's lack of self-control. The child who bites can usually be helped by closer supervision, early intervention, calm but firm reprimands, and by learning alternative ways to deal with feelings of anger and frustration. Make sure you also work closely with relatives, daycare providers and individuals that have close contact with your child and can help reinforce and encourage proper behavior. If the biting behaviors continue for more than a few weeks, it would be wise to consult a pediatrician or child psychologist