

Biting, Hitting, Pulling Hair and Kicking

Biting, hitting and hair pulling:

- Are forms of expression.
- Are generally short lived.
- Are common in children three and under.

What is behind the behavior?

You are in a play group and all of the sudden a child screams in pain. Your child is standing near them and you think, please don't let the cause be from my child. Low and behold, it is. Your child has bitten again.

Why do children bite? There are several reasons.

First, we must understand that a child, under three years of age, does not have social skills. They lack empathy for others. Their world is all about them and cannot understand how their actions affect others.

Children do not have the ability to communicate effectively, sometimes not at all. They do not have the language skills to express themselves or their feelings. Biting, hitting, kicking, and hair pulling are a substitute.

Children can also be overwhelmed by others and overstimulated by lights, sounds and activity in the environment.

Children tend to bite when they are frustrated.

Other reasons children may bite are because they are bored, over-tired, hungry, or need oral stimulation. Children may also need more time to play in an active way.

Children also like to experiment. "What will happen if I misbehave?" It is a definite way to get someone's attention!

Babies and toddlers bite when they are teething. It makes their gums feel much better. Make sure you have a teething ring or wet washcloth on

hand to substitute for the bitten person.

So, now you have the reasons your little angel may be chomping on someone else, but what do you do about it?

READ ON...



Take a bite out of this!

If you realize that your child is developing a habit of biting, it is time to step in and see what can be done. You must stop that behavior before it becomes a part of him/her.

For all parents and caregivers of a 12--18 month, close supervision is required when you have a biter. Find out the reason your child may be biting. Look at your child in the environment. Did someone take a toy that he was playing with? Does she bite at certain times of the day?

Shadow them to look for signs of frustration, fatigue, hunger, or

stress. This observation will help you know what settings may be frustrating to your child. You may also notice that a particular child can cause some frustration and stress for your child.

Distract them with a toy or different activity. You may need to remove them from the situation all together if it is too overwhelming for them.

If your child is old enough to understand, talk to him or her about feelings, saying "You look very upset (or angry).

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RESOURCES:

There are 2 programs that provide services to children who display difficult behavior. The programs work with the child and family at home or in a child care setting. These programs are available free of charge for people who live in AA county:

- **CHAMPS**—
CHildren **A**rriving **M**entally **P**repared for **S**chool. Contact Meredith at 410.222.1715 or Claudia at 410-222-1286.
- **BEST** Program
Behavioral **E**motional **S**upport and **T**raining through Anne Arundel Community College, Parenting Center. Contact Marsha at 410.777.2915.

Biting, Hitting, Pulling Hair and Kicking

What Should You Do When a Child Bites, Hits, Kicks or Pulls Hair

So, despite your best efforts, your toddler has sunk his teeth into another child. What should you do now?

Although it is a common behavior in small children, parent etiquette dictates that we must, as responsible parents, react. But, remember, do not over react.

First, remain calm! Keep your emotions and frustrations in check. Remember, we are always modeling our behavior for our children. Our own behavior teaches them so much, so teach them how to remain calm.

Refrain from asking the age old questions “Why did you do that?” A toddler cannot give an answer to this question.

Do not force your child to apologize to the other child. He may not be ready or he may not be sorry. But, again, set an example

for him. The parent themselves can say to the other child and the child’s parent, “I am really sorry. Is your child okay?” This also allows both sets of parents to focus their attention on the child who has been bitten. Comfort that child. If the child who has bitten does not get attention, it may not be worth it to bite in the first place. (In a child’s mind — negative attention is better than not getting attention at all.)

Get down to your child’s level and in a firm voice say “No Bites, biting hurts!” or for older children “Sally is crying because you hurt her when you bit her.” Keep it short and simple. Make sure your child understands what you are telling him. A one year old may not understand. Remove him from the situation and help him calm down.

Help your child express himself. If

a toy was taken from him, you can help him say, “Logan, I want my toy back. I don’t like it when you take my toys from me.” Acknowledge when your child has done a good job at expressing herself. This will encourage her to continue to use words instead of teeth or legs or hands.

A child generally outgrows biting by the age of 3 to 3 1/2. If your child continues to bite or bites repeatedly, you may need to get some professional help. There are programs available to people who live in AA County.

The BEST program and the CHAMPS program both offer free support and assistance to children and their families. Give them a call to discuss the situation. They will help you determine if more intense services are needed.

Take a Bite out of This! Con’t

Ask yourself:

- What was happening right before she bit?
- Who was she playing with?
- Who did he bite? Was it the same child all the time?

Find out all you can.

Make sure your child is on a

schedule and gets the sleep he or she needs. A child functions much better when he is on a schedule. Do not have your child engaged in play groups when she has had other active things in her day.

Have crunchy, healthy snacks on hand to be able to offer them to your child throughout the day.

If you feel that your child has a

delay in speech and may be biting because of lack of communication, contact the **Anne Arundel County Infants and Toddlers** program at 410.222.6911. A therapist will come to you to do an evaluation and determine if your child needs additional services. This program is also free of charge to people who live in AA County.