



What to do if your child has been bitten at pre-school.

All young children are learning how to behave - it is perfectly natural for them to push, grab, yell, hit and bite if they can't get what they want, or are cross or hurt or anxious.

Not all kids bite, but, anecdotally, experts say, up to a quarter of all children will do so at some stage - mostly between the ages of two and three - it is part of normal developmental behaviour. It is a phase that does pass - by four, most children have grown out of it. Most try the odd nip and move on but some turn into serial biters.

If your child is bitten try hard not to over-react. Treat your child in the same way that you would if he had been pushed or hit by another child - give him sympathy and cuddles, and treat any bruising as appropriate, but try not to get too emotional. It is only natural to want to protect your child from harm but realistically, he will get many minor injuries as he grows up - it's part of childhood.

Try to understand why your child might have been bitten. Children rarely bite out of anger or to deliberately hurt another child - in fact young toddlers can't really understand how much pain they're causing. Some of the reasons children bite are:

- **Experimenting:** Toddlers are learning how their body works - they put things in their mouths, and sometimes nip. It's impulsive and they don't mean to hurt. Often, a baby chomps on someone when they're teething. Sometimes toddlers nip when they're over-excited.
- **Defending:** Some young children learn to bite as a defence, especially if they can't talk. Some might bite if they are anxious or feel threatened. Sometimes changes or upsets at home can bring on this type of biting. These children are trying to establish a safety zone. When they bite, their victim moves away - it's a great defence.

- **Controlling:** Some children know biting is a way of getting other children - or adults - to do what they want. They don't always do this consciously. It may happen when a group of children are jostling to be leader. And as any child who's ever tried it has learnt, biting can be a fantastic way of getting attention.
- **Frustrated or irritated:** The child might want a toy back. Or he wants a biscuit or adult attention, or can't cope with a situation. He may not understand turn-taking and sharing. Possibly things may have changed at home or the child feels under stress. The child doesn't necessarily mean to cause harm, but just can't find the words to express himself.
- **Expressing emotion:** Oddly enough, young toddlers can bite as a way of showing love. Toddlers can have really intense feelings but don't know how to show them, or again don't have the words. Biting can be a way of expressing their feelings.

How to treat a bite

If the teeth have drawn blood, stop the bleeding by applying pressure to the area. If your toddler arrives home with a bite mark it's likely to bruise so apply an ice pack to reduce the swelling. Some toddlers will bruise more easily than others but it should clear up within about 10 days.

What to do

It's impossible for your toddler to predict when another toddler might launch in for a bite, so if he's bitten once or twice try not to worry too much. If he does get bitten or comes home from nursery with bite marks, talk to the staff, who will look into how to stop it. Although you'll find it upsetting, your child won't remember it later on, especially if you don't make too much fuss.

Never encourage your toddler to bite back as this will only lead to a battle. Give him lots of love so he doesn't feel that he was bitten because he isn't liked by other people.

How to approach the other child's parent

If it happens at nursery it's better to let the nursery staff approach the parent. Remember, children are learning about right and wrong and it is very likely that the other child didn't intend to hurt yours. It's much more effective if you don't judge other parents, and understand that one day it could be your own child who is doing the biting!