

Discipline



What is Positive Discipline?

Positive discipline is a way of teaching and guiding children by letting them know what behavior is acceptable in a way that is firm, yet kind.

Punishment describes methods of control, gained by requiring rules or orders be obeyed and punishing undesired behavior. **Discipline** comes from the Latin root word disciplina, which means “giving instruction, to teach.” Recent brain research has confirmed that people learn best when they feel safe and connected to others, in the context of safe relationships. Therefore, the goal of positive discipline is to teach by first creating safe relationships with children. Connection must come before correction in order for discipline to be effective in the long term.¹ The most powerful tool for teaching children is modeling what we want them to do or to be.

Why is Positive Discipline Important?

Positive discipline:

- Teaches children responsibility, self-discipline, problem-solving skills and cooperation.
- Is respectful to both children and adults.
- Builds trust and strengthens relationships, helping form new connections in a child’s brain.
- Builds and maintains self-esteem.
- Teaches children how to manage their emotions.
- Teaches children to deal with stress in healthy ways.
- Invites children to contribute in meaningful ways and develops their sense of significance.
- Develops strong understanding that one has power or influence over what happens to them in life.



Five Criteria for Effective Discipline ¹:

1. *Helps children feel a sense of connection (belonging and significance).*
2. *Is mutually respectful and encouraging (kind and firm at the same time).*
3. *Is effective long-term (considers what the child is thinking and feeling, learning, and deciding about himself and his world, and what to do in the future to survive or to thrive).*
4. *Teaches important social skills and life skills (respect, concern for others, problem solving, and cooperation as well as the skills to contribute to the home, school, or larger community).*
5. *Invites children to discover how capable they are (encourages constructive use of personal power and autonomy).*

¹ (Sound Discipline, (2015). Retrieved from <http://www.sounddiscipline.com>).

What Can Be Done?

Look to find solutions that are “reasonable, respectful, related and helpful,” rather than to “managing” misbehavior² in the following ways:

- Wait to problem solve solutions until you are calm. You will do your best thinking this way and also model an important life skill for the child.
- Show respect by listening to and acknowledging the child’s feelings. This also helps build connection.
- Model the qualities you desire to see in the child.
 - Talk to the child about what happened once both of you are completely calm.
 - Respect the child’s boundaries by allowing him/her to avoid eye contact and let the child make the first move to engage in physical contact with you.
 - Reassure the child that you care.
 - Ask the child to identify how what happened may have impacted others.
 - Use “I” statements instead of “you messed up” statements. Begin sentences with “I” and make them about yourself and how you feel rather than what the child did. This is a less critical way of discussing the situation and helps the child feel less defensive.
 - Ask the child to come up with a plan for reconciliation if others were hurt or property was damaged.
 - Help the child come up with solutions for handling similar situations in the future.
- It is ok to ask for help and talk to someone you trust for support.
- Never discipline a child in anger.



- It is not important to remember a long list of tools or rules about whether a response to misbehavior is “right.” Instead, by asking yourself a few simple questions, one can decide for oneself.
 - Is it respectful to the other person? Is it respectful to me?
 - Does it lead to a better sense of connection?
 - Does it invite the child to have a sense of meaning, value, or capability?
 - Is it encouraging? Does it help to bring out the child’s best self?
 - Will it be helpful long term?
 - Does it invite a sense of social interest and community? Does it contribute to the common good?

Everyday tips for keeping guidance positive:

- Focus on encouragement rather than praise. (See section on Resilience in this toolkit)
- Redirect the child into desired behavior. When children hear “no” or “don’t” too much, they tune it out. Instead, explain what to do, giving alternatives to replace the misbehavior with something acceptable. For example, when misbehavior occurs in the grocery store, ask for help picking things out or re-arranging things in the cart rather than scolding.
- Spending quality time with children on a daily basis helps them be happy and well-behaved.

MORE INFORMATION



Positive Discipline Web Site

Reading this in print? Go to:
www.positivediscipline.com



Teaching Your Child to Cooperate with Requests



The Amazing Brain and Discipline

Reading this in print? Go to:
www.instituteforsafefamilies.org/sites/default/files/isfFiles/amazing4.pdf



Responding to Your Child's Bite



Traditional Time Out



Time-in and Positive Time-out



Traditional Time-Out



Time-out is a well-known method of discipline that can be effectively used with many toddlers and early grade school-age children, although some parents and caregivers report difficulties with this method. The idea behind time-outs is that the child is removed from people and made to sit quietly for a designated period of time. While more trauma-sensitive methods are presented in the Time-in and Positive Time-out article in this section of this toolkit, an overview of traditional time-outs is included here to help ensure that this method is used appropriately and in the most trauma-sensitive manner possible.

Choose a Time and Place

The first step in making time-outs work is choosing a suitable place. This should be in a location where you can monitor the child to ensure safety and compliance. Consider a name for the area such as the “thinking place.” Make sure the area is boring – away from television, toys and other forms of amusement.

A good rule of thumb for the time is one minute per year of the child’s age. It is important to keep close track of the time. Some have found that a kitchen timer works well.

Introduce the Time-Out Spot

Don’t spring time-out on a child. When a caregiver and child are both in a good mood, show the child the spot and explain what it is: a quiet place to go when misbehaving and failing to follow rules, or when needing to calm down. Choose three to five misbehaviors (examples: hitting, biting, angry yelling, throwing a tantrum), and be specific about which broken rules will lead to a time-out. Let the child know how long he/she will have to stay in time-out, and explain that when time-out is over (when the timer or alarm rings) he /she can return to activities.

Don’t Wait to Discipline

If a child earns time in the “thinking place,” take him/her there immediately. Don’t wait until finishing a task, such as watching a television show or washing dishes. Time-outs are most effective when given while the misbehavior is happening or immediately afterward. Young children have short memories, so if the consequence isn’t immediate, they are apt to forget the misbehavior and be confused when they are disciplined later.

Keep Your Cool

Time-outs are a way to give the misbehaving child a break to regain self-control, but it is also important to keep your own emotions in check. When a child is given a time-out avoid yelling, spanking, criticizing, or

getting into long-winded versions of “I told you so.” Simply state the inappropriate behavior in a firm and calm tone of voice, without too much explanation, and send the child to the time-out location. All you need to say is, “No hitting, Mary. Go to time-out.”

Make it Stick

Once you have explained that a specific behavior will lead to time-out, follow through with it every time so the child takes time-outs seriously.

Getting a child to stay in time-out can be difficult. Children may keep getting up or scoot their way out of the designated area, or try to position themselves to see or participate in ongoing activities. If the child refuses to stay put, hold him/her firmly in place for the duration of the time-out, or take the child back to the time-out spot every time the child leaves and restart the timer. If it is necessary to hold the child in place, do so quietly, without talking, as the purpose is to keep the child in the time-out space long enough for the child to calm down. Children will learn quickly that it is easier to sit and finish a time-out the first time so they can rejoin the fun.

Move On

Once the timer or alarm rings to indicate that the time-out is over, have a quick chat with the child. Ask if he/she understands what misbehavior earned the time-out. Allow the child to express feelings and very briefly remind him/her that time-outs occur when rules are broken or to help tone things down. Praise the child for completing the time-out.





Time-In and Positive Time-Out

Adapted from Lappin, S. (2014, Oct. 9) and McVittie, J. (2011, Nov. 29) - full citation on reverse



When we consider use of various discipline tools, it is helpful to consider what we want children to learn and what we are trying to accomplish in the long run. When thinking about using time-out, it is good to ask ourselves, “What is the purpose of a time-out in sports?” “Is it to penalize the players for breaking the rules or is it to give them time to re-group, catch their breath, and come up with another plan?” If our goals for children fit with the second part of this question, two helpful tools are time-in and positive time-out. Both are great ways to teach children how to calm down without isolating them or inviting feelings that can be problematic and lead to further misbehavior.

Being isolated, as described in the Traditional Time-out article in this section of this toolkit, can be very scary and can trigger feelings of abandonment in young children, especially those who have experienced abuse or neglect. When children are put in a time-out place, separate from others, and are told or forced to stay there alone, they may panic, and the negative messages they may already have about what the world is like are re-enforced (if I’m bad, I get sent away). While children can be frightened into compliance, it does not help them learn how to calm down and use their thinking brain to make better choices.

Children have a need to feel important, included and connected. When children act out, it is often because these needs are not being met or they are simply tired or hungry. Sometimes just naming the feeling and the problem is enough to help a child calm down, i.e. “You look frustrated and mad that your tower of blocks fell over.”

Time-in

Including children in an activity that can be done together can provide an opportunity to re-group and calm down, while fulfilling the need for connection. You could ask them to help you work on something—fold some clothes, bake cookies, go for a walk together, blow bubbles, color, draw or paint, read together, or even sit together and talk about their feelings. If they are willing, sharing a hug can be very powerful and may help them feel connected and calmer.

Positive Time-Out

Positive time-out is another way to invite children to do what is needed in order to calm down. What kinds of things do we, as adults, do to soothe and calm ourselves? Bubble baths? Music? Creative projects? Reading a book? Everyone needs a time-out every once in a while, because we all make mistakes and at times “lose our cool”. It helps to have a place to sort out feelings and make a decision about what to do.

Engaging children in identifying a designated positive time-out space creates ownership and increases the likelihood of success. It is helpful to have a designated positive time-out area or give children choices about where they would like to go to re-gather themselves. Brainstorm together the kinds of things that would be helpful, what theme and name to give it, and where it will be located. Ideas include pillows, blankets, favorite stuffed toys, books, writing materials, coloring books, art supplies, music, and a snow

globe to shake and watch as it swirls and settles. Themes could be tropical vacation, outer space or camping. Everyone can be involved in decorating the space. It may be helpful to set guidelines for use of the space, especially if you are worried children will go there to avoid chores or homework.

Positive time-out is more effective if it is chosen by the child rather than ordered by the adult. It might be helpful to ask a child who is struggling to stay calm, “Do

you need to go to [name of cool down area]?” If the child says no, which is unlikely if that child helped create the space, you could ask if it would be helpful to have a time-out buddy go as well.

Children are able to identify for themselves when they are feeling better and can then leave the space. Once children have experienced positive time-out, they often begin to use it without prompting from adults.

Our ability to calm down improves as the brain develops. The prefrontal cortex, where we manage self-regulation, is not fully developed until the age of 25. This means a 3-year-old cannot calm down as easily as a 6-year-old or an adult.

Once both you and the child have calmed down, you can work on solving the problem that created the issue to begin with, if needed. If the problem does not need to be addressed further, the best thing to do is just move on rather than bringing it up again.



(Adapted from Lappin, S. (2014, Oct. 9). Using “Time Out” to Practice Calming Down in the Classroom (or at Home). Sound Discipline: Making Connections that Matter <https://sounddiscipline.wordpress.com/2014/10/09/using-time-out-to-practice-calming-down-in-the-classroom-or-at-home/>)



Teaching Your Child to: Cooperate With Requests

Does this Sound Familiar?

HKevin and Chelisa are at the end of their rope. They are constantly reminding their three children to pick up toys, to play nicely together, and to help with chores. They would very much like their children (ages 6, 4, and 3) to respond to their requests. However, it often feels as if all three children are uncooperative and out of control. They run in the house, leave toys on the floor, and refuse to sit at the table for meals. On many occasions, the children's failure to follow the rules results in shouting, frustration, and tears. Lately, Kevin and Chelisa have stopped asking their children to follow their directions, because it's just too hard to get them to follow directions.

The Focus

Young children can learn to follow adult expectations, including performing simple chores, if the expectations are developmentally appropriate (meaning they match what can be expected for children at that age) and are taught to the child. Below is information on what you might expect from your preschooler and some tips for helping your child learn and follow your requests.



What to Expect

Children who are 3 often can

- Put their dirty clothes away
- Put toys or books away
- Put clean clothes away
- Put their shoes away
- Put non-breakable dishes in the sink
- Wipe the table with a sponge
- Put trash in the trash can
- Put napkins on the table
- Wash their hands independently

Children who are 4 often can

- Pick up toys on request
- Put clean clothes away
- Put clothing on independently
- Undress and place clothes away
- Wash self in the bathtub
- Brush teeth independently
- Put silverware on the table
- Put dry pet food in a dish
- Return outdoor toys to their storage spot

Children who are 5 often can

- Remember and restate household rules
- Ask adults' permission to do activities
- Follow established rules and routines without being asked (e.g., wash hands before eating, clean up toys before going to bed)
- Independently do a simple chore (e.g., feed a pet, get the mail, make the bed)
- Help adults with more complex chores (e.g., water plants, fold clothes, wash dishes, dust)
- Be independent with most self-care skills

When children have disabilities, they may need special assistance to meet these expectations. You may want to do the following:

- Expect your child to do only part of the task, while you complete the part that is difficult for him
- Provide help to your child so that she can complete the task
- Provide instructions in different ways (e.g., using a picture or using a gesture) so that your child understands what you are asking

Teaching your child to do simple chores

Are you surprised that young children can manage so many different activities and responsibilities? Are you interested in your child becoming more independent and helpful? If you want your child to be able to do a skill or activity, *you have to teach him or her what to do*. It's really less complicated than it sounds. To teach your child, follow these steps:

1. State clearly what you want your child to do. For example, if you want your child to throw his napkin in the trash, you would say, "Andrew, go put your napkin in the trash can." Sometimes parents do not state their expectations very clearly. For example, a parent might ask, "Where does that go?" or say, "Don't put your trash in the sink." These directions do not tell the child exactly what is wanted and may not produce the expected behavior.
2. If your child seems unsure of what is expected or does not understand the direction, follow your direction with, "Let me show you how to do it" (said in a gentle tone of voice) and provide your child with the minimal amount of help that he needs to do the activity.



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3. When your child attempts to do the activity or carries out the request, immediately praise his effort. You might say, “Look at you! You are a big boy. You can throw the trash in the trash can.” The key is to praise with enthusiasm and be specific about what your child did.

4. Be prepared for the possibility that the very first time your child attempts a new activity (e.g., puts silverware on the table, socks in the drawer, toys on the shelf), her efforts may not meet your expectations (e.g., silverware is mixed up or socks are not put away neatly). When your child is first learning an activity, it is very important to encourage her attempts. If you discourage or reprimand your child because she did not do it quite right, she may be less eager to try the activity again.

5. Your child may need to practice the new skill or activity before he can do it independently. If the activity is complicated and you have shown your child how to do it (e.g., putting toys on the shelf), you may want to avoid actually showing your child how to do it and just provide verbal direction instead. Remember that when providing instructions, you should state exactly what you want your child to do (e.g., pick up the blocks and put them in the bucket) and respond with praise when the child completes the task.

need to give your child a warning before making a request. If your child has a disability or language delay, you might need to provide a concrete cue that shows your child what you want her to do (e.g., handing your child the toothbrush to indicate that it’s time to brush teeth). You might need to get down on your child’s level and make sure you have her attention (e.g., make eye contact, touch your child gently) before making a request. If your child seeks negative attention (e.g., misbehaves to get your attention), you might try ignoring the misbehavior (not scolding or talking to your child) and then praising your child when he is doing something appropriate.

Why Do Children Sometimes Refuse to Cooperate?

The preschool years are a time when children are learning how to express themselves and interact with others. Their refusal to cooperate is not always a deliberate refusal to follow your directions, but may be due to other reasons. For example, your child may

- Need a warning that you expect him to stop an activity to comply with your request
- Might be thinking about something else and not hear the request
- Might not clearly understand your request
- Might be more used to receiving negative attention (e.g., yelling, scolding) and may refuse the request to get that attention

By thinking about why your child may not be responding to you, you can determine what your next step should be. For example, you may

What Can You Do When Children Refuse to Follow Instructions or Requests?

When children are very young, they are often eager to learn simple chores and they approach the tasks with enthusiasm. Part of their joy comes from receiving your praise and attention and from the sense of accomplishment they have at being a “big boy” or “big girl.” It is important to recognize that once the child is able to do the activity independently, he might be less

motivated to complete the task consistently. (Face it, how many adults take joy in making the bed?). At this point, you should remember that your praise and attention can be a powerful tool to gain your child's cooperation. If your child is reluctant to do a chore that he is capable of completing independently, try the following:



1. Move closer to your child, get down on his level, and restate your request, stating exactly what you expect in a calm and firm tone of voice. (e.g., "Parker, pick up your books and place them on the shelf.")

2. If your child resists or refuses, take a deep breath (so you can remain calm) and think about why the child might be refusing. After examining the situation, you might

- Tell a child who is reluctant to stop an activity, "I see you want to keep playing. You can play for 3 more minutes. I'll time you. Then you must clean up."
- Tell a child who is angry, "You are telling me you are angry, and you don't want to clean up. The books need to be picked up. Once you are calm, you will need to pick them up." Then wait until your child is calm before restating your direction.
- Tell a child who is slow to begin, "I will help you get started. I will pick up one and then you pick up one."

- Tell a child who may not be aware of the fun activity that will come next, "When the books are on the shelf, you can take your bath with the new bubble bath that we bought today."
- Tell a child who is seeking to have control, "You have a choice. You can put the cups or the silverware on the table. You must help set the table."
- Tell a child who is not enthusiastic about the task, "Let's play beat the clock! I will time you and see how fast you can finish it."

3. As soon as your child begins cooperating with the request, provide praise or feedback. When you praise your child, describe exactly what he or she is doing. For example, "That's great. You are picking up the books. I like how you are cleaning up."



The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning



Child Care Bureau



Office of Head Start



Does this Sound Familiar?

Responding to Your Child's Bite

Marc is preparing dinner and his two children—Jack (3 years) and Jalen (1½ years)—are playing with cars on the kitchen floor. Suddenly, Marc hears a bloodcurdling scream coming from Jack that quickly turns into sobs. Between sobs, Jack shows his dad his arm and slowly says, “He bit me.” Jalen has bitten Jack. Marc is frustrated. He doesn’t know what to do. Jalen bites often. He bites his brother, other children on the playground, and children in his childcare class. Marc is not sure how to respond. He wonders if he should use “time out” as a consequence, but thinks that Jalen is just too young to understand the relationship between biting and a “time out.”

The Focus

Many toddlers and young children bite. Developmentally, most toddlers don't have enough words to express how they are feeling. They primarily rely on sounds and actions to communicate what they are thinking and feeling. Biting is one of the ways toddlers express their needs, desires, or feelings. While biting might be very frustrating, your child is not biting purposefully annoy you or hurt anyone. Your child might be biting to say, "I'm scared," "People are crowding me," or "I'm frustrated." Naturally, parents and caregivers worry that biting might seriously injure another child. And they worry about the negative impact for the biter as well, such as being avoided by other children. The good news is that there are many ways to reduce and to stop a child's biting.

Why Do Children Bite?

Young children bite for many different reasons. Understanding why your toddler might be biting is the first step in reducing or stopping the behavior. The following are some of the reasons young children bite.

- **Communicating frustration**—Many young children bite out of frustration. They often do not know other ways to express their strong feelings. Biting might communicate messages such as, "I don't like that" or "I want that toy" or "You are in my space."
- **Challenges in playing with others**—Some young children can become overwhelmed when playing near or with others. They might not know how to share, take turns, or communicate their wishes or interests.
- **Cause and effect**—Toddlers might bite to see the effect it has on others. They learn quickly that it gets a BIG reaction and has a major impact from both the children they bite and the adults who witness it.

- **Exploration and learning**—One of the most important ways toddlers learn about their world is through their senses. Biting might be a way to find out what an object, or person, feels like. In other words, their biting might be trying to communicate, "You seem interesting. I wonder what you feel and taste like?"
- **Oral stimulation**—Some children bite because they enjoy and seek out the physical sensation of biting or chewing.
- **Teething**—Many children experience pain when they are teething. Biting or chewing on something can help ease the pain of teething.
- **Monkey see, monkey do**—Toddlers love to imitate or copy the behaviors of others. They learn so much by practicing behaviors they observe. For example, if Jalen sees Sara bite and sees that Sara receives quite a bit of attention for biting (even if it is negative attention), Jalen might want to try out that biting behavior to see how the various adults in his life react.
- **Coping with uncomfortable feelings**—When children are hungry, sleepy, bored, or anxious, they are less able to cope with life's ups and downs (for example, a toy being taken, not getting that second cookie after lunch) and might resort to biting instead of finding other ways to express their needs or feelings.

Normal but Unacceptable

While biting is a typical behavior for young children, that doesn't mean it is acceptable. Biting can cause discomfort, angry feelings, and on occasion serious injury. Other children may begin to make negative comments about (e.g., "he's mean") or avoid playing with children who frequently bite. Social reactions such as these can be very harmful to a child's relationships with other children and his feelings about himself.

What Can You Do?

Children can be taught more appropriate ways to express their needs and feelings.

Observe

Observe your child to attempt to understand more about why he/she bites. Identify any patterns, such as what happens before your child bites. Notice when, where, and who your child bites. Does he/she bite when crowded in a small space with other children, or when he/she is hungry or sleepy? Does he/she bite when there are a number of children present or when the noise level is high?



Try to prevent biting

Once you understand why and when your child is likely to bite, you can try to change situations in order to prevent it. The following are just a few ways you can use your observations to this end:

- **If your child seems to bite when frustrated:** You can say, "You are so frustrated. You want that toy." Teach your child simple words such as "mine" or "no." Teach some basic sign language or gestures for things like "help" or "stop."

- **If your child seems to bite because he/she is overwhelmed by playing near or with others:**

Join your child in play by sitting on the floor and coaching him/her in play. Your child might need help to understand other children's ideas. He/she might also need guidance to learn and practice how to join play, take turns, share, communicate with other children, and get help if he/she needs it. For example, if another child tries to take your child's doll, you might say, "Molly thinks your doll looks fun. She wants to play too. Can we show Molly where the other dolls are?"

- **If you think your child is biting to see what happens when he/she bites:**

Clearly and calmly let your child know that biting hurts. Keep your reaction neutral, non-emotional, short, and as uninteresting as possible to avoid teaching that biting has a big effect on the adult. An adult's big reaction can be very rewarding and reinforcing. Encourage your child to experiment with cause and effect in other ways. For example, you might want to show him/her how to wave "bye bye" so that others will wave back, or let your child tickle you and then give him/her a big laughing reaction.

- **If you think your child might be biting for oral stimulation:**

Offer crunchy healthy foods such as crackers, rice cakes, or pretzels at snack intervals throughout the day. Or, provide appropriate and interesting items for your child to chew on (e.g., teething toys).

- **If your child is biting because he/she is teething:**

Give him/her a teething ring or cloth to chew on. Chilled teethingers can also soothe sore gums.

- **If your child tends to bite when he/she is tired:**

Provide increased opportunities for your child to rest. Gradually move naps or bedtime up in 10- to 15-minute intervals to earlier times. Ask your child's other caregivers to watch and stay close when he/she seems tired. Minimize stressful or stimulating activities when your child is tired.

- **If you believe your child might be biting when he/she is hungry:**

Try to offer more frequent healthy snacks. Show your child what he/she can bite—food.

- **If you believe your child might bite when he/she is bored:**

Provide novel, interesting activities and toys to explore and play with. Change the environment as needed (when you see your child becoming bored or unfocused) by rotating toys or going outdoors or into different play spaces.

- **If you believe your child might bite when he/she is anxious:**

Talk about any changes he/she might be experiencing. Help your child put words or signs to his/her feelings. Attempt to keep confusion and uncertainty at a minimum by talking about transitions, schedules, plans, etc.

What Can You Do in the Moment When Your Child Bites?

- 1 Quickly yet calmly remove your child from the person he has bitten. Calmly (e.g., without yelling or scolding), clearly, and firmly say, "Stop. No biting. Biting hurts." Show and explain the effect of the bite on the other child. For example, you might say, "Jack is crying and sad because the bite hurts him."
- 2 Focus most of your attention on the child who was bitten. Understandably, adults often react strongly to the child who bit as they try to correct the biting behavior. However, even negative attention can encourage the biting. Helping to soothe the child who was bitten teaches empathy and helps the child who bit to understand the power of his actions. It might be helpful to say to the child who was bitten, "I'm so sorry this happened. I know biting really hurts," as a way to model apologies and empathy. Avoid trying to get your child to apologize. While it is important for your child to develop empathy, trying to get your child to apologize typically results in paying more attention to the biter and not the child who was bit.
- 3 Acknowledge your child's feelings. You might say something like, "You are frustrated. Let's find another way. Touch gently or ask for the toy. You can say, 'Can I have that?'"
- 4 When your child is calm (not in the heat of the moment), teach him/her other ways to express his/her needs and desires. For example, you might say to your child, "Biting hurts. Next time, if Sienna is grabbing your toy you can say stop or ask a grownup for help." It might be helpful to role play scenarios where your child can practice saying "stop" or "help."





What to Do When Biting Continues

- **Be patient.** It can take time to learn a new way to cope with difficult feelings. Continue to observe and try to understand as best you can the purpose of the biting, the need it is meeting. Stay calm when it happens and focus on teaching your child alternative ways to get needs met. Continue to help put words to your child's experience: "You don't like it when Jalen bites. You can say 'stop.'"
- **Shadow or stay within arm's distance of your child during playtime** with other children and/or at times when you believe your child might be more likely to bite. Staying close gives your child a sense of security and makes it easier to intervene before your child bites.
- **Talk to others who care for your child.** Share with your child's daycare provider or other caregivers the strategies you use when your child bites. Share the observations you have made about when your child seems to be more prone to biting. Ask your childcare provider for help and suggestions for preventing and responding to biting. Try to have all caregivers approach the biting in the same way.
- **Provide your child with education about teeth and what teeth are for.** Teeth are for chewing foods, not people. Offer your child appropriate things to chew.

- **Read books about biting.** As you read, ask your child how the different characters might be feeling. If you have an older toddler, you can ask him/her to "read" the book to you by telling you what is happening based on the pictures. Some recommended titles include
 - *Teeth Are Not for Biting* by Elizabeth Verdick
 - *No Biting* by Karen Katz
 - *No Biting*, Louise by Margie Palatini

What Not to Do

- **Don't bite back.** Biting a child back to show what it feels like creates confusion and fear. Young children often cannot make the connection between why you bit them and their own biting. And it teaches that biting is an acceptable problem-solving method. Biting hurts and can be considered a form of child abuse.
- **Don't use harsh punishment.** Yelling, scolding, lecturing, or using any form of physical punishment has not been demonstrated to reduce biting. Harsh reactions such as these might increase your child's level of anxiety or fear and might cause more biting. They also do not teach children a new skill to use instead of biting.

When to Seek Professional Help

If your child's biting does not decrease over time, you might want to consider seeking guidance from your pediatrician or the nurse in your doctor's office or medical clinic. If your child is enrolled in an early childhood or Head Start program, ask if there is someone there who might be able to address the biting or refer you to another professional. A child therapist or a child development professional can help you to sort out potential reasons for your child's biting and to devise a plan to address it.

Portions adapted with permission from "ZERO TO THREE. (n.d.). Chew on This: Responding to Toddlers Who Bite." Retrieved June 5, 2008, from http://www.zerotothree.org/site/PageServer?pagename=ter_key_social_biting&JSevSessionIdr009=4rzxepxog4.app2a



The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning



Child Care Bureau



Office of Head Start