

# FOCUS

## On Early Childhood Mental Health



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## *Toddlers Who Bite*

Did you know that toddlers who attend an early care facility five days a week all year can expect to be bitten by another toddler about seven times? While no one wants a child to bite other children or be bitten, at least we know it's a common behavior. But why is it so common and what can you do about it?

### **Why toddlers bite**

- They lack the language skills to ask for what they want or express how they feel
- They're experimenting to see what happens
- They don't want to share with another child
- They're teething
- They're over-tired
- They're bored

### **How to prevent biting**

- Anticipate when bites might happen by paying attention to what's going on with the child right before the bite
- Distract the child with another activity
- Suggest another way to handle the situation instead of biting
- Give the child something else he or she can bite or chew
- Suggest ways to share popular toys
- Be clear that biting is not acceptable

### **What not to do**

- Don't get angry
- Don't shame the child
- Don't bite back

Biting is normal and common, but it is important to teach children that biting is not a good way to get what they want. The good news is that most toddlers stop biting by the time they are about three years old, and in the meantime you can always ask for help if your efforts to teach your child to stop biting don't seem to be working.

*\*Judith Garrard, University of Minnesota School of Public Health, in "Teaching Your Toddler Not to Bite," <http://www.parents.com/toddlers/development/discipline-spanking/teaching-child-not-to-bite/>. Look for more ideas in the article, "Chew on This: Responding to Toddlers Who Bite," at [www.zerotothree.org](http://www.zerotothree.org).*