



Biting & Hitting

Helping the Hurter and the Hurt

Young children's language skills are just developing, so they often find it hard to express their needs and wants verbally. Some children resort to physical actions to communicate their feelings. When frustrated, they may bite or hit.



It's understandable that parents and children are upset by these behaviors, whether their child is the hurter or the hurt. However, it's important to remember that biting and hitting are not uncommon in this pre-verbal phase and with proper guidance and support, children will learn to express themselves more constructively.

Here are some tips that can help you deal with a biting or hitting situation:

Stay calm

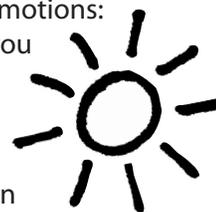
- Act quickly but do not overreact. Anger and yelling will only scare both children.
- Make friendly contact with the other child's parent or caregiver. Understand that the parent of the biter or hitter probably feels bad about their child's behavior. Join as allies in resolving the situation. Take this opportunity to model good social behaviors for your child.

Acknowledge each child's feelings

- Describe the facts of the situation ("Max took your truck and Isabel, you bit him on the arm") and ask Isabel what she was trying to communicate. Remember that she probably wasn't trying to be aggressive.



- Help the hurter give words to her emotions: "You're feeling frustrated because you wanted to play with that truck."
- Teach this child to recognize when she starts to feel angry, afraid or frustrated. Encourage her to seek an adult's help when she has those feelings. Keep in mind that repeat biters and hitters may not be getting the support they need to find alternatives. Do tell this child that biting and hitting are not okay.



Help both children understand the other's point of view

- Tell the hurter that biting and hitting hurt. Point out that the other child is upset because he was hurt.
- Forcing a child to apologize may not be a successful strategy. She won't understand the concept and may feel humiliated by having to do so. She may even think that biting and hitting are okay, as long as she says she's sorry afterwards.
- Help the hurter to find concrete ways to show concern. This child might bring a tissue, pat the other child on the back, or do something else to make him feel better.

If your child has been bitten or hit...

- Clean and care for broken skin, bruises, or other injuries. Contact Habitot staff for assistance if necessary.
- Help this child understand that the biter or hitter was probably frustrated or angry, or may have been afraid or felt trapped. Was the hurter trying to communicate this before the biting or hitting? Were there advance signals that the hurt child missed?



- Encourage this child to figure out ways to respond assertively in the future and help her practice what to say and do. Teach this child that biting or hitting back is not acceptable.

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