



## WHEN BABIES AND TODDLERS BITE

For ease of reading the female gender has been used throughout this brochure.

The following information provides suggestions for managing babies and toddlers who bite. When a baby or toddler bites, a parent's reaction is often one of surprise and dismay.

Babies and toddlers may bite for many reasons. Breastfed infants, who are teething, may rub their gums up and down on the areola. This is probably an attempt to relieve discomfort.

Older breastfeeding infants, who already have teeth, may be experimenting. Your infant may sense you are distracted or tense or is impatient for the 'let-down' reflex to occur.

Toddlers (approximately 1-3 years old) may bite as a reaction to stress or feeling helpless. Biting behaviour is a normal developmental stage. Sometimes it may be in self-defence when a play situation has become less friendly. Other reasons for biting include being unable to play co-operatively, frustration at not being able to get their own way or wanting attention. It is usually short term behaviour as toddlers come to realise that biting is hurtful and coping skills develop to express their strong feelings.

## WHAT TO DO ABOUT BITING?

### INFANTS

- A cooled teething ring can feel good to suck and chew on
- If your infant is over four (4) months of age a commercially available gel may be applied as directed to soothe the discomfort of sore gums.
- A gum massage can relieve the swelling of teething.



### OLDER INFANTS

Breastfeeding mothers might try the following:

- When biting occurs, remain calm and avoid over reacting to your infant.
- Remove her from the breast saying 'No' firmly as you are doing so.
- Wait a few moments before offering her the breast again.



## TODDLERS

- Supervise your toddler at all times, especially if you know that she is going through an anxious or stressful time.
- Watch and try to read your toddler's cues.
- Warn other parents that your toddler sometimes bites.
- Distract your toddler before biting begins.
- Avoid the temptation to bite your toddler back – this teaches her that it is acceptable behaviour.
- Remain calm and remove your toddler from the situation.
- For a few moments keep your toddler separated from the situation that caused her to bite.
- Let her know that her feelings are real but that biting is not an acceptable way to react.
- Give extra attention to the child who has been bitten.
- If, after rejoining the activities, your toddler bites again remove her from the situation for a longer period of time;  
For example 5 minutes and occupy her with something else.
- It may take several episodes of biting but your patience and persistence will be rewarded.



If your child continues to bite, despite your best efforts, you may need to Seek professional advice. At any time you require help please consult:

- Child & Family Health Nurse
- General Practitioner
- Karitane Careline on 1300 CARING (1300 227 464)  
(TTY (02)9794 1848 for hearing impaired)

Web: [www.karitane.com.au](http://www.karitane.com.au)

E-mail: [Karitane.online@sswsahs.nsw.gov.au](mailto:Karitane.online@sswsahs.nsw.gov.au)

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