



Parenting Toddler SOS: "My Biting Toddler is After Our Dog and the Baby!"

By Kelly E. Nault, M.A.

Parenting Toddler Biting Question:

"Kelly, my 1.5 year old has taken to biting both the dog and the baby. I've tried many things and have read many parenting books but am still without a solution. What can I do? I am worried that he will either hurt our baby or the dog will hurt him". - Mom Seeking Biting Solution

Parenting Solution to Biting Toddler:

When your sweet child turns into a household vampire, many Moms and Dads are unsure of what to do. Biting is common in toddlers—they lack the maturity and the vocabulary to express their frustration. While biting may be common, it does not mean you need to put up with it. There are plenty of ways to make biting less appealing to your toddler.

Here are five effective parenting toddler steps that can help you solve your biting problem once and for all:

1. Find your toddler's biting payoff: Ask yourself, "Why is my child biting?" For every negative misbehavior there is a powerful purpose—a pay-off for children. Find your child's pay-off and you will be pointed in the direction of the solution.

My educated guess is that the biggest reward for your toddler's biting is your attention! With a new baby needing and demanding so much of your attention (especially if you are breast feeding every couple of hours) your oldest, now has to share your attention—something he never had to do before. A new sibling's arrival heralds a new era for your toddler—an era in which the sun no longer rises and sets around him. This

major life transition requires quite an adjustment from your first-born, who was used to having all your attention to himself.

When children aren't able to get enough of their parents' attention positively, they will settle for negative attention. Why? Because *some* attention is always better than *none*. So, biting is a powerful hook to take your attention away from the baby and bring it back to your toddler.

2. Remove the parenting toddler hook: As parents we can never truly change our child's behavior. We *can* influence it—but 'make' them do exactly what we want them to do, when we want them to do it—no. Children only change when they ultimately understand the benefit of the change. The good news is that by changing our reaction to their behavior, we can nudge them in the right direction and start experiencing the positive change we seek.

Decide to change your reaction to his biting. Instead of getting upset, raising your voice, threatening or using time-outs, put your emotions on hold and use a neutral tone. Use the same tone you would with the neighborhood grocer (polite but not overly engaged). Calmly and directly state, "Biting is not allowed." Then quickly hug your child and remove them from the room OR remove the baby or dog and go about your business. Turn your back on them if need be, but do not become engaged with them (other than the quick hug) at this time.

3. Discourage biting by consistently acting and follow through: Make certain you are not raising your voice, lecturing, yelling or biting back in any way. Any aggressiveness on your part will only teach your toddler that his behavior is appropriate. Each time he bites respond in the nonchalant manner recommended in step two—follow through *each and every* time.

4. Prevent biting behavior by giving your child what they really want and need: A little of your positive attention can go a long way. With the demands of a new baby, it can be next to impossible to carve out extra time to spend 1-on-1 with your toddler. Yet, if you don't give it to him, he will continue to demand it with negative behavior. Elicit the help of your husband, family, friends or even a nanny or babysitter to spend time with the baby so you can spend a little more happy play time with your toddler.

5. Notice when your toddler is doing well: I've saved the most powerful parenting toddler tip for last. When you see your toddler being gentle with the baby and dog, notice this by saying something like, "Look at how the baby loves to be touched by you when you are gentle. She is lucky to have a big brother like you."

Biting is an unfortunate solution many toddlers have found to coerce their parents into giving them attention. If parents change their tune by not giving much attention when toddlers demand it, instead giving their attention when their child is doing things they

appreciate, they will soon find that biting is reserved for favorite crackers and food only!

Kelly Nault-Matzen, MA, family counselor, corporate parenting spokesperson and award winning parenting author of *When You're About To Go Off The Deep End, Don't Take Your Kids With You* shares time-tested tools that motivate children to want to be well behaved, responsible and happy! To gain access to more parenting tools and to access your free online parenting course visit <http://www.ultimateparenting.com>

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