Help! My Child Is Biting!  
Aggressive Behavior and Toddlers

It is perfectly normal for toddlers to bite or hit, but it is very scary and upsetting for both parents and children. Toddlers often go through a period of aggressive behavior for lots of reasons. Young toddlers don’t always have words to express their emotions and often communicate physically by hitting or biting. Toddlers communicate their anger, fear, or frustration the only way they can, by using their bodies, not words. Toddlers also don’t know the social rules of behaving with other people; they have to learn how to interact with others.

As toddlers grow, learn language to communicate, and learn social rules, most pass the biting and hitting phase with few or no mishaps. Aggressive behavior does become a problem for some children, however. Thankfully, there are many ways to deal with aggressive behavior calmly and effectively.

- **Be a detective.** Find out why your child is biting or hitting. Does your child get excited and try to kiss too hard? Is your child angry and responding aggressively to another? Is your child under stress? Is your child copying another child? Knowing why your child is biting or hitting is the first step in planning an intervention.

- **Let your child know that biting or hitting is not OK.** Calmly tell your child “no biting” or “no hitting” and offer an acceptable alternative behavior, like biting a pillow or . . .

- **Use time-out if necessary.** Some children need to be removed from the situation for a few moments of time-out.

- **Pay attention to the victim.** Teach your child the consequences of biting or hitting by comforting the victim.

- **Never hit or bite back.** That sends a hurtful, scary, and confusing message to the child that hitting or biting is OK for adults.

- **Be ready with a hug.** Let your child know that you still love her, even when you have to set limits.

For more information:  
*Behavioral and Developmental Pediatrics* by Steven Parker and Barry S. Zuckerman, 1995  
*Toddlers and Preschoolers: The Parent and Child Series* by Lawrence Kutner, 1995

BUSM*: Department of Pediatrics, Boston Medical Center

Developed for Healthy Steps by Department of Pediatrics, Boston University School of Medicine, Boston Medical Center.
"It’s Mine"
Sharing and Turn Taking in Toddlerhood

Sharing and turn taking can be very difficult for toddlers. They are just learning social rules and how to behave with other children. They may be beginning to understand the concept of ownership (mine!), but their egocentric thought leads them to conclude that they own everything! Toddlers still believe they are the center of the universe, and this egocentric thought prevents them from fully understanding another person’s needs. Toddlers also have limited impulse control, so it’s amazing that they share or take turns at all.

How can you help your toddler learn to share and take turns?

- **Don’t expect your young toddler to take turns and share.** Toddlers often don’t understand what sharing and turn taking means. They might not have the impulse control to wait or give up a favorite toy. Expect and accept that there will be problems, then you won’t be upset when they happen.

- **Model good sharing and turn taking.** Toddlers can and do learn from example. Show them how to share by modeling it for them. (“You can have half of my banana.” “You go first, I’ll wait for my turn second.”)

- **Let your child know that sharing and turn taking are hard.** “I know you want the truck. It’s hard to wait. You’re trying so hard!”

- **Teach and model empathy.** Show your child the effects of her behavior on others, but don’t force an apology. Teach your toddler about empathy by your words and actions. (“When you took the crayons, Ana felt very sad. Poor Ana.”) This is more effective than demanding an “I’m sorry.”

- **Praise attempts and successes.** “What a great job waiting.” “I know you tried very hard to wait for your turn. I bet you’ll be able to do it next time.”

- **Make sharing and turn taking a game.** “Let’s play catch, your turn first.” “We’ll sing while we wait. I bet we can think of ten songs to sing!”

- **Set a timer.** “You can play with the bike for five minutes, then when the bell rings, it’s your brother’s turn.”

For more information:

_Toddlers and Preschoolers: The Parent and Child Series_ by Lawrence Kutner, 1995  
_What to Expect the Toddler Years_ by Arlene Eisenberg, Heidi E. Murkoff, and Sandee Eisenberg Hathaway, 1996
SHOPPING WITH TODDLERS

“Ideas for Parents”

“Me Go Too!”
Survival Strategies for Shopping with Toddlers

Shopping with toddlers is hard work! How can you help you and your toddler avoid disaster and enjoy your time together?

- **Timing is everything.** Make sure your child is well fed, rested, and feeling OK when you go shopping.

- **Make a plan and keep it short.** Map out a schedule to keep time in the store and time on the bus or in the car short. Make a list of what you need at the grocery store and organize it by where the items are located.

- **Be prepared.** Always pack a bag with snacks, toys, and books. These are important tools for keeping your child entertained or comforted.

- **Prepare your toddler.** Tell your toddler in advance what the plan is for the day. Give reminders through the day of what will happen next.

- **Set clear limits.** Tell your child what the rules are for behavior and remind your toddler of the rules while shopping.

- **Avoid problems.** Stay away from toy and candy aisles. Find the “candy free” checkout aisle if your store has one. Stay away from shops that aren’t “child friendly” and have lots of breakable items.

- **Make shopping a game.** Keep your child busy by counting items together or finding different colors in the store. Your child may be able to pick out some of the items on your list from the shelves.

- **Know when enough is enough.** When your toddler shows signs of being too tired or overwhelmed to go on that last errand, don’t push it. Call it a day and plan to do that errand another day. Save both of you the stress!

- **Reward good behavior.** Create a special ritual or treat for after shopping. Take a trip to the park or go for ice cream. Shopping is hard — you both deserve it!

For more information:

*What to Expect the Toddler Years* by Arlene Eisenberg, Heidi E. Murkoff, and Sandee Eisenberg Hathaway, 1996

*Your Child at Play: One to Two Years* by Marilyn Segal and Wendy Masi, 1998
Handling the “No” of Toddlerhood

As toddlers grow more independent and more verbal, “No” becomes a very useful word. It is easy to learn (they hear it a lot!), it helps toddlers declare their independence, and it gets attention. Toddlers begin to use “No” for just about any situation. They can even say “No” to something they really want! This toddler negativism is very normal for toddlers, but it can be very frustrating for parents. As toddlers grow more mobile and independent, parents may discover that in their attempts to set limits, they are saying “No” almost as often as the toddler. When toddlers and parents get into this “No” spiral, it can lead to interactions that are upsetting to both parent and child.

How can parents avoid the “No” spiral?

- **Give your child some control.** Toddlers need to assert their growing independence by having some control in their world. What can your toddler be in charge of? Can she choose the game or the toys, or help choose the clothes she wears?

- **Let your child say no.** When is it OK for your child to say “No”? “No” is an important word for children to be able to say. It helps them feel in control and competent and may keep them safe.

- **Pick your “No” battles.** Limit your “No’s” to the most important rules, like those about safety and interacting with others. Try to use limit-setting techniques like distraction or choice, instead of saying “No.”

- **Don’t give your child the opportunity to say “No” if it is not an option.** Offer choices. Instead of saying “Do you want to get dressed?”, say, “Do you want to wear the red or green shirt?” Give your child choices that are safe and healthy. Control the choices so they are manageable for your toddler. Try giving your toddler just two choices to pick from.

- **No means no.** If you say no to your toddler, follow through with your limit. When you say “No” to climbing on the chair, don’t give in to your child or ignore it when your child does it anyway. Toddlers can learn very quickly that “No” doesn’t really mean no.

- **Respect your toddler’s “No”s.** Don’t laugh at your toddler’s attempts at independence. It is an important step in developing self-esteem. Help your child feel competent and confident by respecting her attempts.

For more information:

_Toddlers and Preschoolers: The Parent and Child Series_ by Lawrence Kutner, 1995
OVEREXCITEMENT

What Can I Do When My Toddler Is Overexcited?

Channel that energy in a positive way by encouraging some of the activities listed below, but remember to closely supervise your child at all times!

Indoors:
- Punch a punching bag or a pillow.
- Knead or pound play dough.
- Drum on a kitchen pot.
- Toss a beanbag in a safe place.
- Dance to all kinds of music.
- Play "Simple Simon" or the "Hokey-Pokey."
- Use a pounding bench with a wooden hammer.
- Tumble safely on a mat or a thick carpet.
- Jump up and down on something safe.
- Splash in the tub or the sink.

Outdoors:
- Jump, climb, run.
- Swing, slide, climb on the jungle gym.
- Kick or throw a ball.
- Pedal a tricycle, pull a wagon.
- Splash in a small pool.

Try these ways to relax with your child:
- Put on soft music or talk softly.
- Turn down the lights.
- Quietly tell a story or read a book.
- Give him a warm bath.
- Paint with brushes or fingers.
- Play in the sink with water and bubbles.
- Make a mix cake, stir up the batter.
- Rock, cuddle, and sing quiet songs.
- Rub lotion on her arms and legs.

When my child gets wound up, we

For more information:
What to Expect the First Year by Arlene Eisenberg, Heidi E. Murkoff, and Sandee Eisenberg Hathaway, 1996
What to Expect the Toddler Years by Arlene Eisenberg, Heidi E. Murkoff, and Sandee Eisenberg Hathaway, 1996