

Misbehavior And Discipline

For children ages 1 - 5

If your child hits, bites or acts out in other ways, you're not alone. This behavior is common in young children and can be caused by many things. Most kids act this way for only a short time until they learn better ways of showing how they feel.

Why Do Children Misbehave?

There is no one answer to this question.

- **Exploration.** Young children learn about their world by using their senses. A young child may not know the difference between chewing on a toy or biting a finger.
- **Teething.** Very young children may feel their teeth coming in. Chewing and biting feels good!
- **They are testing you.** Kids may bite or hit just to see what happens or to shock you.
- **Attention.** Kids will do anything (“good” or “bad”, to get your attention.
- **Copying.** Kids love to do what others do. Never hit or bite a child back as this teaches them it's okay.
- **Independence.** Acting out often gets the child what is wanted without asking for help.
- **Frustration.** Young kids do not have the words to say how they feel. They may show you by hitting, biting and kicking.
- **Stress.** Small or large changes (like losing a toy or starting a new school) can be very stressful for your child.

What Can Parents Do?

Find out why your child hits, bites or acts out. Ask the 5 W's—Who, What, Why, Where, and When. There may be a pattern to your child's behavior. If so, look for clues that your child is about to hit or bite and try to prevent it.

Ways to Prevent Biting/Hitting

Have a routine. Routines are comforting to children and can reduce stress in times of change.

Do not let your child get too hungry or tired. Serve small, frequent meals at the same time each day. Make sure your child gets plenty of rest.

Have a safe play area. Put things you do not want your child to touch or grab out of sight. This will stop you from having to say “No” and take things away from your child.

Make sure there are plenty of toys during play time. This will help avoid fighting. Young ones do not know how to share.

Spend time with your child when he is not acting up. This teaches your child that behaving poorly isn't needed to get your attention.

Ways to Stop Biting/Hitting

- Acknowledge your child's feelings. Tell your child it is okay to be mad, angry or scared.
- Teach your child how to show his feelings. Ask your child to use words instead of biting or hitting.
- Tell your child it's okay to bite a stuffed toy or hit a ball with a bat, but it's not okay to bite or hit another person.
- Teach your child to say “Sorry” and comfort the person who's hurt.
- Children age 2 and over can be given a “time-out”. Take the child to a quiet place to calm down. A good rule is one minute for each year of life. Example: a 3 year old should have a 3 minute time-out.

A Word About Spanking

Spanking is a way to get your child's attention. But it doesn't teach the right way to behave or how to solve problems. It may teach that it's okay to hit. Be a good role model. Praise your child for behaving well.

For more information on this topic call your doctor or your health plan's member services department.