

Sample Dialogue:

Using Instructive Intervention Techniques with Toddler Biting

To stop biting, try to respond as consistently as possible, whether it was a biting attempt or an actual bite; the child's need for learning specific skills is the same either way. Teachers can use this Instructive Intervention approach to coach a child in how to curb hurtful impulses and how to use expressive alternative actions next time. Both aggressor and victim may need this type of coaching, since biting often follows an overt action by another child, but it can be done in a few short minutes.

Scenario: Dylan tries to grab a toy being used by Jason. Jason bites Dylan's hand.

- “Jason, no biting. I won't let you be near people when you hurt them.” Move Jason over to a chair or table or a spot on the floor, a short distance away from the victim. Don't involve Jason in tending to Dylan. He can watch you do this but not participate. You are not letting him “near people” right now.
- Calm the victim, wash and ice the wound, or ask another adult to do that, so you can go have a talk with Jason. (Bring Dylan over for this talk, if you can; they both have things to learn.)
- “Jason, I understand that Dylan was trying to take Thomas the Train from you. You felt mad, and you bit him.”
- “Dylan, I know it's hard to wait for toys. But grabbing a toy from someone is not ok.”
- “The problem is that you both wanted Thomas the Train at the same time.”
- “Listen, Jason, even when you feel mad, it's never ok to bite. We don't put our teeth on people. We touch people gently, like this (demonstrate with a gentle touch of your hands).”
- “Here's a good idea: Instead of biting when you feel mad, you can hold your teeth together and make this noise, so he knows how you feel.” (Now, demonstrate “an alternate way” to use his mouth while showing feelings. Show him “the Grrrr” technique OR the Breathing in-and-out-through-the-teeth technique; they are both popular with children who bite.)
- “And if he grabs, you can tell Dylan ‘No!’ in a big, strong voice. If Dylan still grabs your toy, don't bite him. Just come over to a teacher and we'll help you get your toy back.”
- “Listen, Dylan, next time you want a turn with Thomas the Train, you can tell Jason, ‘I need a turn’. And if it's too hard to wait, don't grab the train, Dylan. Call me or come get me and I'll talk to Jason about giving you the next turn.”
- “I'm so glad we talked about this. Now Jason is all done biting and Dylan is all done grabbing. Let's all go find something to play with together!”