

# TOP

## Tips on parenting



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TOP is published & produced by:

The Emma Eccles Jones Center for Early Childhood Education at

**Utah State UNIVERSITY.**

## Dealing with Biting

by Diane E. Strangis, Ed.D.

Toddlers are delightfully impulsive, affectionate and creative. They are learning to live in a social world. Unfortunately, young children frequently use a nonverbal approach to interactions: Hitting, kicking, pushing, and biting as means to communicate needs or emotions, or simply to initiate play. While biting is typical for some young children, it is a behavior that most people wish to discourage. Biting is painful, reinforces a message that we get what we want by using physical means, and can lead the victim to learn patterns of helplessness. Other children don't wish to play with a child who bites, nor do other parents wish for their children to be near a child who may chomp a playmate. It is important to understand both the underlying causes and some methods for dealing with biting. The goal is to help the young child move to a higher level of interaction, and to use strategies that are more acceptable.

Young children who bite are not vicious monsters destined for prison! They may be using this behavior for a number of reasons. Until the age of two, many children are teething. Children who have not bitten previously, may relieve the pressure of four incoming toddler molars by chewing on the nearest item. That item may be a sibling's arm or cheek. Many young children do not have the verbal skills to tell us what they need or want. Frequently, biting emerges in children ages 15-24 months, and peaks at around 18 months of age. These months are the time when children are gaining understanding, or receptive, vocabulary, but cannot fully express their desires in words. Also, toddlers do not share well. As words, short sentences, and simple sharing behaviors begin to emerge, biting may decrease. Very young children live in families. While toddlers cannot engage in detailed discussions about the birth of a new sibling, or that mom has lost her job, they are very aware of these events. Increases in biting may be related to family issues, even such simple and positive ones as a visit from grandparents.

“It is important to understand both the underlying causes and some methods for dealing with biting. The goal is to help the young child move to a higher level of interaction, and to use strategies that are more acceptable.”

Biting may be accidental, at first. Toddlers are little scientists. They are interested in the reactions to their behaviors and gain power by predictability. They repeat behaviors because they don't understand that the same thing will happen again. If they once bite a parent and the parent yells, the child may repeat the behavior to determine if the reaction will be the same. It becomes almost an interesting game. Toddlers often bite the

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## Dealing with Biting

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same person rather than randomly biting everyone with whom they are in contact. It may even be their closest sibling or best buddy because they are the ones whose company the toddler most often seeks. Finally, toddlers are great imitators. If others engage in playful behaviors such as love bites, the child is likely to mimic that behavior. Unfortunately, toddlers are not able to regulate the strength of a bite, so what an adult has given as a love bite may be returned later as a hurtful wound.

Like other areas of misbehavior, no cookbook recipe can be given for working to prevent or control biting. However, a few strategies may be helpful. Most importantly, try to determine the cause and the patterns. While no parent has free time, sometimes using a little time to get to the root of biting may save time in the long run. Keeping systematic notes about the biting incidents for three days can help establish what is going on and what strategies to use. Keeping an index card in the pocket or several little pads of post it notes throughout the home serves as a place

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## activity corner

### No-Cook Playdough

#### INGREDIENTS

1 cup flour  
1/2 cup salt  
2 Tbsp. vegetable oil  
1 tsp. alum  
Water

1. Mix everything except water.
2. Add a small amount of water at a time until it is the consistency of bread dough. You will not need more than 1/2 cup.
3. Add food coloring, if you like. If food coloring is desired, it will be easier to add it to the water. You may want to use this activity to experiment with making colors such as purple, orange, etc.

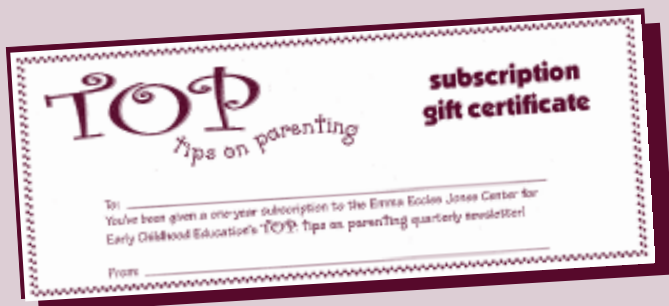


### Finger Paint

#### INGREDIENTS

1 cup flour  
1 1/2 tsp. salt  
1 cup water

1. Combine flour and salt.
2. Add water.



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## question corner

"My son is a very picky eater. I worry that he is not getting the nutrition he needs to grow properly. How can I get him to eat a wider variety of foods?"

~ Angie in Utah



Feeding children can be a worrisome activity, if we let it. As children grow and learn, their appetite changes almost daily. Keep in mind that good nutrition means an average of foods eaten over several days and not just the foods eaten on one or two days. A parents job is to provide foods the child eats and the child decides how much of the available food to eat. We often make the mistake of only offering foods we know the child likes and give the parents job (deciding what foods to provide) to the child. Assess not only what your child is eating but also what you are offering.

When providing food for children, remember that many children prefer raw vegetables to cooked vegetables and apple pieces without the skin. If fruits and vegetables are provided in small, easy to eat pieces, a child is less likely to be overwhelmed by a large apple or a whole carrot. If you look at everything your child has eaten over a 5 to 7 day period and average it out, chances are he will have eaten a nutritionally adequate diet.

One of the biggest influences you can have on what your child eats is to be there when he is eating and provide positive conversation and good company. Eating with a trusted adult allows a child the freedom to try new foods in a relaxed and positive atmosphere.

To sum it up,

1. Provide the foods you want your child to eat
2. Don't judge your child's total diet based on one or two days of "extreme" eating.
3. Eat with your child in relaxed, positive surroundings..

~Kris Saunders, Extension Associate Professor, Department of Nutrition and Food Sciences at Utah State University

**question corner** features questions posed by parents to early childhood experts who provide brief responses in this newsletter. If you have any questions you would like answered, please send email to [eejcenter@coe.usu.edu](mailto:eejcenter@coe.usu.edu) or mail to EEJ Center for Early Childhood Education • Utah State University • 6515 Old Main Hill • Logan UT 84322-6515.

## Dealing with Biting

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to jot a few notes. Note the time, anything you noticed about the situation (e.g., "Tamika walked to Justin—sandbox"), and who was bitten. Look over the notes to help see if anything is routinely associated with the biting.



Strategies for dealing with biting may need to proceed on several levels. Avoid modeling biting as an acceptable behavior. Do not bite back nor engage in love bites. This is confusing to a young child. Second, look at your collected information to see if the biting occurs at certain times or with certain people. Try to determine what your child is trying to say by her behavior. One instance that comes to mind is of a parent who realized after observing that her child always bit near lunchtime. When the parent gave the child a few crackers to tide him over, the behavior miraculously stopped.

Children often need to be given acceptable items to bite. Keeping cold teething rings or squishy, soft toys on hand to give to a child to bite is a substitute for a nearby person's arm. Often, the adult can almost tell by a certain look or behavior a child has that a biting episode is about to happen. Quickly offering a substitute to bite on, or getting between the chomper and the chompee can buy time. Adults need to model and encourage toddlers to use specific words to communicate instead of using physical means. In addition, they need to teach siblings and peers to use words if they are about to be or have been bitten. Teaching a child to yell, "Want that!" (i.e., "I want that toy you have" in toddlerese) or "No!" is an

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## activity corner

### Parent Directions for Pop Bottle Bean Planter

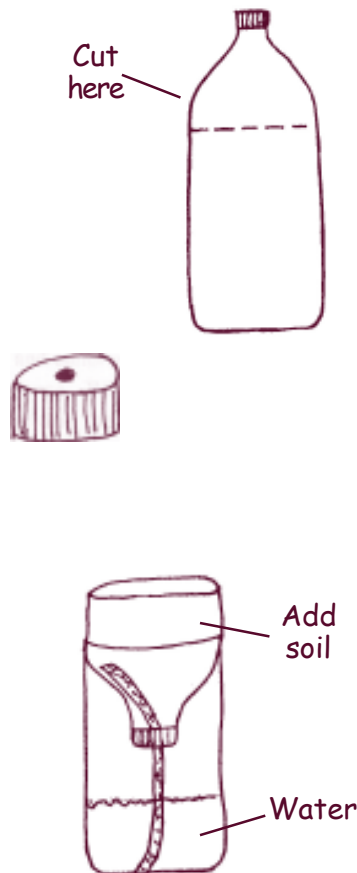
see Science Corner on pp. 6-7

#### MATERIALS NEEDED

Empty 2-liter pop bottle with lid  
Water  
Scissors  
Hammer and nail  
10" piece of 1" wide interfacing  
Soil  
Seeds

#### PROCESS

1. Remove the label from a 2-liter pop bottle by soaking it in hot water.
2. Cut the top off the bottle, cutting about 1 inch below the curve of the bottle.
3. Poke a hole in the bottle cap using a hammer and nail.
4. Wet a strip of interfacing (approximately 1" wide by 10" long) and thread it through the hole in the bottle cap.
5. Put water into the bottom of the pop bottle.
6. Invert the top of the bottle and set it into the base. Make sure the wick reaches the water at the bottom.
7. Add soil and you are ready to plant seeds in the top.



You may want to water the plant from the top at first to get the wicking action of the system to work properly. When that happens, water will be taken from the reservoir at the bottom and top watering will be unnecessary.

### Dealing with Biting

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improvement over biting. Keep adult directions to the biting child simple, saying things like “No bite” or “Biting hurts.” The victim needs to be taught to call out and run away if about to be bitten. Victims should not be made to feel guilty, but empowered. “Susie, yell ‘No’ and run to the kitchen if Joey starts to bite.” Trying to provide multiples of popular toys or putting away the single toy that is the cause of conflict may help avoid situations where toddlers need to share.

At first, biting incidents will continue to occur. Immediately soothe the child who has been bitten, but keep the perpetrator near by if possible. Have the child who has done the biting get a cool wet cloth to wipe the injured part. Toddlers often are surprised or distressed when they bite and don’t know what to do. Helping the injured party teaches children to help others even when they’ve done wrong. When things are a little calmer, talk to the children and simply explain or model acceptable behaviors.

Try the new strategies for dealing with biting for several days and keep track of the results. Too often, we abandon a strategy before it has had time to work. After two weeks of trying with no success, you may need to observe again, then try another strategy. Be reassured that most biting occurs in waves and usually passes as a child develops better verbal and social skills. Love the toddler, and work to teach them acceptable behaviors.

*~Diane Strangis is an Assistant Professor in the University of Florida's Unified Early Childhood Program, a parent, and was a toddler teacher for 12 years.*

# What does Quality Child Care Look/Sound/Feel Like?

a three part series by Mary Sciaraffa

## Just what does quality child care SOUND like?

Sounds of giggles, laughter, and enjoyment from the children is often what parents listen for when searching for someone to care for their children. However, there are many sounds that parents should be tuned into when searching for a child care provider. How does your child's early childhood program sound when compared to the ideal program?

Does your child spend his/her day in a place that has...

- caregivers who ask questions that require more than one word answers?



- caregivers who do activities with children both individually and in a small group such as:

- reading books?
- talking about the pictures in the books?
- use puppets?
- say nursery rhymes?
- singing songs?

- caregivers who have daily musical activities?

- children who freely talk with each other and with the adults?

- caregivers who encourage children to succeed and who use words that help children feel more confident and in control of themselves?

- caregivers who listen to the children?

- caregivers who respond to children's
  - crying?

- gestures?
- sounds?
- words?
- questions?

- different types of music played for the children throughout the day, such as children's songs or classical music?

- musical instruments on low open shelves where children can help themselves?



- caregivers who talk with parents on a daily basis?

- shelves that separate the quiet and noisy areas?

Sounds from an early childhood program are an important piece of identifying whether the program is of high quality or not. Hang on for the next article on what an ideal early childhood program feels like. For additional information on quality early childhood programs, please contact the National Child Care Information Center at (800) 616-2242.

*~Mary Sciaraffa is a former infant/toddler teacher, child care director, and Early Childhood Education Instructor. Currently, she is pursuing a doctorate degree at Louisiana State University.*

## science corner: CULTIVATING INTEREST IN SCIENCE

by Rebecca Monhardt, Ph.D.

Young children are naturally curious and have many questions about the living world. The study of plants provides many opportunities for children of all ages to make observations, ask questions and seek answers to their questions.

Questions are the heart of scientific inquiry, and children's questions should serve as the guide for their experiences in all areas of science. When parents respond to children's questions with "How can we find out?" rather than the quick and definitive answer, the door is opened to a world of discovery and adventure. Science, when it begins with children's interest can result in meaningful learning and the child's realization that learning really is fun!

In early spring when winter seems to never end and warmer weather seems just out of reach, indoor plant activities can be very appealing to children. An interesting and appropriate experience for primary school children involves watching plants grow from seed, making observations and formulating questions about how plants grow.

### Jack and the Beanstalk Revisited

Bean seeds are among the easiest for young children to grow. Reading the classic children's tale, *Jack and the Beanstalk* is a great way to stimulate interest in planting seeds as well as a format for discussing what is fact and what is fiction. Students may discover that there really is a little bit of magic in every seed! That magic is the potential for life and the growth of a new plant.

To begin, soak dried beans overnight in a small amount of water. Pinto beans and lima beans from the pantry shelf work well for planting because they germinate quickly and are easy for young children to handle and see. Once the seeds have soaked overnight, children are able to take a look at the wonder in a simple bean seed first hand. Each bean seed has a seed coat that helps protect the inner part of the seed. After soaking, this seed coat will slide off very easily if the child gently rubs the bean between his/her fingers.

Once the child has carefully removed the seed coat, the bean will separate into two halves. The child may think the bean seed is "broken." Again, rather than simply telling the child that is just the way it is, it is much more effective to have the child examine more of the soaked bean seeds to see for themselves that all bean seeds look alike when the seed coat is removed.

When children are encouraged to look carefully at the inside of the bean seed, they will be able to see a tiny baby plant tucked away inside of the seed. A hand lens will give the child an even closer look at the wonder tucked away inside those same pinto beans that make their way to the dinner table.

Children will be anxious to see whether or not the very same beans that they eat will actually grow into a plant. Commercially prepared potting soil is an excellent medium for planting the seeds especially in winter when soil found outdoors may be frozen. Place the soil in paper or plastic cups, an old flowerpot, a milk carton, a 2-liter pop bottle cut in half (see Activity Corner on pg. 4) or just about any kind of available container will serve as an excellent place for the bean plant to grow.

Younger children may simply be interested in seeing whether or not their bean will actually grow. They will be fascinated by the fact that seeds can actually grow into plants. Even very young children can record what they did through drawing pictures in a plant journal.

### Children 3<sup>rd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> Grades

Older children may have many questions about planting the seeds that they may want to investigate:

*How much dirt should go on top of the seed?*

*Do beans need light to sprout?*

*Is the light from a lamp just as good as sunlight?*

*How much water do they need?*

*What direction should the beans be planted in the soil?*

These are all ideas that children may want to test in order to grow the very tallest beanstalk possible. Older children should be encouraged to carefully record what they did and manipulate only one variable at a time in their investigations. For example, if they want to know whether or not the direction a seed is placed in the soil makes a difference in the time it takes for the seed to come up, they should plant two or three seeds, each facing a different direction. Everything else should remain the same (kind of soil, amount of water the seed receives, the kind of seeds used, etc.) Growing bean seeds is a very simple activity but one that offers many different possibilities for children. That is the mark of a "good" science activity.

*Seeds of Change* has a free seed catalog with many other interesting varieties of plants including a wonderful selection of sunflower seeds.

Contact them at:

Seeds of Change

P.O. Box 15700

Santa Fe, NM 87592-1500

1-888-762-7333

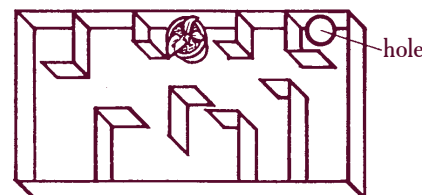
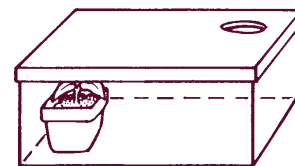
<http://www.seedsofchange.com>.

### Plants Are Just Amazing!

If children are interested in investigating a bean plant's response to light, they can construct a maze to find out whether or not a plant will grow toward the light. To build the maze, the following materials are needed: a cardboard box with a lid, cardboard scraps, masking tape and scissors.

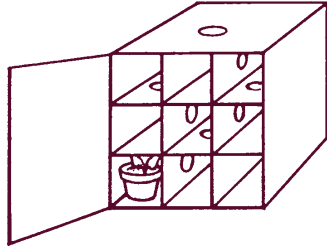
The design may be quite simple for younger children, consisting of a

shoebox with a hole cut in one end of the lid, or a more complex design constructed by older children. The bean plant is placed in the box and will grow through toward





a hole in the box that provides a source of light. If an intricate maze has been constructed, the bean will actually weave its way through the maze toward the light. Children should observe the plant on a regular basis (every 2-3 days) to see if it needs water and to measure how much the plant has grown. Multiple mazes can create opportunities for children to actually “race” their bean seeds and predict which bean seed will make it to the light first.



## Suggested References for Plant Activities

Kite, L.P. (1995) *Gardening Wizardry for Kids*. New York: Barrons Educational Series, Inc. ISBN: 0-8120-1317-4

A wonderful resource that provides a fascinating description of the history and folklore of common fruits and vegetables along with indoor plant growing experiments using common food seeds.

National Gardening Association web site:

<http://www.kidsgardening.com/>.

Activities, free e-newsletters, and information for parents who garden with children. Many excellent resources.

Dennee, J., Peduzzi, J. & Hand, J. (1996). *In the Three Sisters Garden: Native American Stories and Seasonal Activities for the Curious Child*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company. ISBN: 0-7872-2175-9

A wonderful activity book for introducing children to an ancient and contemporary Native agricultural tradition. The Three Sister’s Garden consists of corn, squash and beans grown together in an ecologically friendly way. This book contains earth-friendly gardening methods, history, and hands-on/hearts-on activities, stories and provocative ideas, activities and background information.

## Picture books

Bofill, F. (1998). *Jack and the Beanstalk*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books. ISBN 0-8118-1843-8

A stylistically illustrated version of the classic tale with text in both English and Spanish.

Burns, D. (1996). *Berries, Nuts and Seeds*. Minnetonka, Minnesota: Northword Press. ISBN 1-55971-573-1

A simple field guide for children.

Cooney, B. (1982). *Miss Rumphius*. New York: Puffin Books. ISBN 0-14-050539-3

Much loved story of how a woman makes the world a better place by planting seeds.

Demi (1990). *The Empty Pot*. New York: Henry Holt Company. ISBN 0-8050-4900-2

A Chinese boy learns about honesty, plant growth, and scientific investigation.

Garland, S. (1993). *The Lotus Seed*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Co. ISBN 0-15-201483-7

A touching story that illustrates just how long a seed can survive.

Heller, R. (1983) *The Reason for a Flower*.

New York: PaperStar Book. ISBN 0-698-11559-7

Flowers, though beautiful, are also needed to produce new seeds.

Krauss, R. (1945). *The Carrot Seed*. Mexico: Harper Collins. ISBN 0-06-443210-6

Seeds take time to grow and a boy’s persistence pays off.

## ABC Books

Jernigan G. (1989). *Agave Blooms Just One*. Harbinger House. ISBN 0-943173-44-2

Lobel, A. (1990). *Alison’s Zinnia*. New York: Mulberry Paperbacks. ISBN 0-688-08865-1

Pomroy, D. (1997) *Wildflower ABC*. Harcourt Brace & Company. ISBN 0-15-201041-6

Schories, P. (1996). *Over and Under in the Garden*. Farrar Straus Giroux. ISBN 0-374-35677-7

## Parent Background Information

While you don’t want to dampen students natural curiosity by providing complex explanations that are too abstract for young children to understand, it is important that you don’t foster or encourage common misconceptions that many children hold regarding plants. The following BIG IDEAS are important in providing a strong foundation upon which future learning can be built:

- Plants are alive. Children often view plants as somewhere between living and inanimate objects, something that does not respire, eat or reproduce. Their understanding of the term “living” is restricted to the animal kingdom. Plants and animals are different but both are living things.
- Plants, like animals need food to live, but unlike animals, plants make their own food. Many children believe that plants take food from the soil. Recently when watching my favorite gardening show on television, the host was working with a group of children having them plant seeds. She actually reinforced this fact by saying that the roots of a plant take in food. This is a common misconception. While it is not appropriate to get into the complexities of photosynthesis with young children (many believe middle school is the time to address this topic) it is certainly appropriate to let children know that plants make their own food. Their leaves serve as food factories.
- What should you tell children and what should you let them find out for themselves? There are some things that children cannot “discover on their own regardless of the amount of time given to investigate it. The names of things are an example of this idea. Regardless of the amount of time given, a child will not be able to discover the color “blue” so telling the child the name of a color is of course appropriate. Terms such as “seed coat,” “embryo,” “monocot,” and “dicot” are other examples that are appropriate to tell students because they cannot be determined through discovery.

~Rebecca Mohnhardt is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Elementary Education at Utah State University.

# Utah State UNIVERSITY

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Logan, UT 84322-6515

## TOP: tips on parenting

is published quarterly by the Emma Eccles Jones Center  
for Early Childhood Education at Utah State University.

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