



“Ask Renatta”



April 2007

“Ask Renatta” is a quarterly feature of the Office of Child Care, answering real questions about early childhood, child development and education. We invite parents and primary caregivers who are employees of the County of Los Angeles and the general public to pose your questions to “Ask Renatta”. Your question will be answered individually and posted on our Web site to share with others. If you would like to ask a question about your child, click on rcooper@cao.lacounty.gov, enter “Ask Renatta” in the Subject line, and ask your question.

This issue:

- My 20-month old is biting.
- Is homework normal for a kindergartner?
- Leaving a nine-year old home alone after school.

My 20-month old has started biting, including other children, in her child care class. I am frustrated and don't know what has changed.

Biting is an unfortunate by-product of the group socialization of young children, which is what happens in a child care center. Your child is very focused on her own experiences and developmentally not in tune with the feelings and experiences of others. This is developmentally appropriate for a 20-month old, not for a five-year old.

I have lots of questions about your child's biting. Does she bite at home? Who and when? Does anyone at home bite her, even in a loving or playful manner? Any behavior of this type has to stop immediately; it is confusing to the child.

Now, to focus on her biting, does she bite to gain possession of an item? Does she bite to see what will happen? Does she bite and hold on, or does she bite and release? Has she been bitten in an aggressive manner in child care or anywhere else? In your question you said, “I don't know what has changed.” Discuss this with your child care provider, out of your child's hearing. You are to understand your child's behavior not influence it.

Once you know when and why she bites, you are ready to put an end to the behavior. She must receive a clear stern message that it is not okay to bite, “Stop! No biting.” This should not be yelled, but spoken in a firm voice. Making eye contact while it is being said is a good touch and it demonstrates that you are serious. Do not yell at the biter or threaten her. Attempting to end aggressive behavior with adult aggression is never a good idea. Doing so gives the message that it is okay to behave in an aggressive manner when you are the biggest!

You should then attend to the child who was bitten. Children sometimes receive a great deal of attention for biting others; it tends to reinforce the behavior. Some children receive a great deal of attention for being the victim; you do not want to reinforce this behavior either. The biting behavior should be handled in a firm consistent manner, even though many adults respond to bites in an emotional manner.



My daughter is in kindergarten and regularly has homework. Is this normal?

It is normal today. Welcome to kindergarten in the era of “No Child Left Behind”, and the K-12 Educational Standards that were adopted by the State of California in 2005! Children will have homework every evening and the nature of that homework has changed. Homework used to be a review, a reinforcement for what a child had learned or been exposed to during the day. Currently a teacher may send new materials home with a child for homework, in fact “No Child Left Behind”, stipulates that parents are expected to do 30-minutes of academic instruction with their child every evening.

For children who have more than one subject, this can mean 30-minutes of instruction and/or academic support in each subject area.

Kindergarten has also changed. Teachers recognize that children are expected to come into kindergarten knowing what they used to learn. Children are now expected to do sight reading by February of their kindergarten year. This means they must know their ABC letters and the sounds made by the letters. It is necessary that you make thoughtful and consistent arrangements for yourself or someone to be available to help with your child’s homework. An older child may not be the best plan if he or she is still in school, they will have their own homework, and someone will need to be available to help them.

My nine-year old son is begging to be able to go home after school, and not attend the after-school program he is enrolled in. He would be home for three hours on his own – is this safe?

I do not know your son, or your housing circumstances. However, I would have to say that no, it is not a good idea or a safe idea for a nine-year old, even a very mature one, to be home alone every afternoon for three hours. He is too young to be left to his own devices in this manner. More likely he would be spending his time watching television or playing video games, sedentary no exercise and no stimulation. There would also be tremendous temptation for other children to come to your house to play, and the situation would become even more unpredictable and unsafe.

Has his attitude about his after-school program changed recently? I know that many programs have become “school after school” to reach their goal of helping children do better on their tests. Free play, music, and arts activities, not to mention field trips seem to be a thing of the past in many after-school programs. What is the situation like at his program?

Talk to him, the director, his teachers, and see if there is any way for his needs to be met in this program. Is there another program he could attend that would meet his needs? Attempt to isolate any negative variables that you can do something about. Do what you can to make the time once he comes home pleasant, and focused around things he would like to do, at least initially.