



## Advice Sheet – Biting

### What is biting?

Biting is a normal part of childhood development. Young children bite for many different reasons, from teething to seeing what reaction it will provoke. Many children between ages 1 and 3 go through a biting phase, which they eventually outgrow. Still, biting is something you want to discourage.

### Why is child biting?

#### Consider if it is:-

- Sensory need,
- Comfort – tend to cuddle in and then bite
- Defence – stop others invading space or
- Taking toy,
- Communication,
- Attack – hurt others randomly when cross
- Enjoy the reaction in a cause-and-effect type of way
- Normal stage of development
- Teething (see attached advice for teething)
- Stress – sudden changes in their daily routine, or stressful events in children's lives can cause them to bite to express feelings.

### Why do it?

#### Observe:-

- When does it happen – time of day, unstructured time, when they between activities, when staff distracted at meal times, changing times, when other child noisy, when adult attention focussed elsewhere, other child getting attention. What precedes it? Complete an ABC sheet to notice any patterns.
- Particular children or staff members targeted – look at possible reasons why some and not others, do they react differently, are they more easy to get to, do they invade child's space, are they noisy, like the same toys and competition, take up key persons attention.
- How often?
- Do they bite furniture, hard toys, soft toys?
- What happens after they bite- could they feel this strategy working for them for example gain immediate adult attention, get the toy they want, remove child who too close invading space, physical comfort.

### How to do it a setting

- **Always provide an environment in which children can be supported to recognise and regulate their emotions.**
- **Send out a general note to parents about biting reassuring them that you have policy in place**

#### Strategies:-

- If when cuddling in, give them soft toy, rag to bite into as they cuddle in. If they bite then put them down straight away so they understand that if they want to cuddle they must not bite.
- If in defence – encourage more appropriate strategies – use your words, put out flat part of your palm, seek adult help.
- If in attack when cross or not like the noise someone makes, not like other child having adult comfort. Be aware this likely to happen and try and prevent opportunity.
- Make sure you don't inadvertently reward the behaviour.

- Remove opportunity. Shadow the child and remove them from situations where likely to bite or distract them.
- Teach other children how to respond to the child. For example He doesn't like you being too close to him keep an arms length away.
- Use your voice and a facial expression to show that biting is not acceptable. Speak firmly and look directly into the child's eyes and say, "No. Do not bite."
- Provide babies with objects to mouth (teething rings, frozen bagels, washcloth).
- Make sure children have plenty of opportunities to play with other children so they learn how to share and take turns. Plan cooperative and turn taking games.
- Recognise children's positive relationships with other children. Praise children who share, wait their turn, and treat others kindly.
- Give children lots of attention. Cuddle with them. Play or read to them—help them feel loved and safe.
- Be aware of children's feelings: watch for signs of possible conflict and growing frustration, and redirect the child's attention to prevent him/her from biting.
- Encourage children who can talk to use words instead of biting. For example, "Tell Bill with your words that you need him to move, instead of biting him. Say, 'Please move, Bill'."
- Tell the child that if she/he is upset, to come to you for help instead of biting another child.
- Explain that biting hurts and they must not bite others.
- **Be calm and firm:** Use "biting finished" or "biting hurts"
- **Comfort the victim:** Direct your attention to the person who has been bitten, especially if it is another child
- **Comfort the biter, if need be:** Some children don't realise that biting hurts. It's OK to comfort a child who may be upset about hurting someone but try not to reinforce this negative behaviour if the child bites to get attention
- **Offer alternatives:** When things have calmed down, suggest alternatives to biting, like using the words "no", "stop" and "that's mine" when wanting to communicate with others
- **Redirect:** Distraction works wonders! Help redirect the child's attention to a more positive activity

General provision:

- Books
- Classroom rules and expectations

### How to move it on / What's next?

I would recommend you conduct your own internal risk assessment and look to preventative measures, based on your school - staffing, resources, number of children attending, positive behaviour management strategies (including a behaviour support plan if applicable), rewards system etc.

You will need to use your best endeavours to implement protective measures.

Possible strategies:

- Make sure the child's schedule, routines, and transitions are predictable and consistent. It is important to ensure that staff' responses in any given situation are also predictable and consistent. Support for transitions could be enhanced by the use of signs/symbols/ visual timetables and minimal language to avoid ambiguity. A strategy to try and support compliance with a request to undertake an activity/piece of work might be the use of a sand timer – 5 -10 minutes doing a guided activity, and then a 5 minute "choose" break.
- Endeavouring to act before the child has a chance to bite. Remove the child away from the child/person they're about to bite . Or don't put him/her into large groups if that's where it

happens. Plan in advance for the behaviour. Take the child somewhere quiet to calm down. Minimal language may be beneficial if the child's behaviour is escalating.

- Observe the child to learn where, when, and in what situations the behaviour occurs – the behaviour triggers. Sometimes an adult may need to stay close to the child to prevent undesired behaviours.
- Praise good behaviour. Consider the use of "motivators" for the child.
- Offer activities and materials that allow the child to relax and release tension. Some children like yoga or deep breathing. Offer playdough, foam balls, bubbles, soft music, and other stress-reducing items. The child may benefit from some physical activity prior to the start of a lesson. A sensory profile may also be an option to consider.
- Use positive guidance strategies to help the child develop self-control. For example, offer gentle reminders, phrased in a way that tells him/her what behaviours are expected – the use of signs/symbols may be appropriate, for example a "traffic light system".
- Pay attention to signals. Stay close and step in if the child seems ready to engage in undesired behaviours.
- Reinforce positive behaviour by acknowledging child's appropriate words and actions and evidence of desired behaviours.
- Be sure behaviour expectations are age-appropriate and individually appropriate for the child. Expecting a child to do something he or she is not able to do can cause children to feel stress. Stress can lead to undesired behaviours.
- See attached links for Self-Regulation strategies
- [Pathways.org | Tools to maximize child development](#)