

Specific challenging
behaviour in the
Early Years

Biting



Understanding Biting

Biting is very common in young children! It happens for different reasons, in different individuals and in varying circumstances.

The key to stopping biting is understanding the reasons why the child is biting.

Why children bite: Developmental stages:

Exploration	Infants and toddlers learn through their senses. So when a child is given a toy the first thing they will often do is put it in their mouth. Children do not always know the difference between chewing on a toy and biting someone.
Teething	Between 4-7 months children generally begin teething. At this time gums can cause discomfort and infants can relieve this by chewing on something or someone!
Cause and effect	At about one year old children are interested in finding out what happens when they do something (cause and effect) e.g. When they bang a toy on the table it makes a loud noise. When they bite someone they get a reaction.
Attention	Older toddlers may bite to get people to notice them. A child would rather have negative attention rather than no attention. Being ignored is not fun and biting is a sure way of becoming centre of attention.

What do we do when it does occur?

- Be consistent across all staff. Discuss and plan a common approach
- Try to react calmly and quietly
- Never laugh even if it did not hurt!
- Don't bite the child back
- Give sharp clear no backed up with clear gesture e.g. stop hand sign, on their eye level
- Remove the biter from the situation with minimum attention, eye contact etc
- Give child brief time out (depends on age)
- Use timer to show how long to sit away from group
- Give the victim attention
- Make sure that biting is never rewarded with the child getting what they wanted e.g. child bites to get toy, victim removed and biter has the toy to themselves
- Avoid lengthy explanations as this may reward the child by giving them more attention
- When the incidence is over quickly distract the child and praise them for something appropriate they are doing.

Imitation/Copying	Older toddlers learn through copying. If they see other children biting they may also bite, especially if the other child gets lots of attention. If an adult bites a child back this gives the message that biting is ok!
Independence	Mine and me, and me do it are frequently heard at this age as children establish their independence. Biting can be a powerful way of controlling others. E.g. If you want a toy or you want leaving alone biting can help you get what you want.
Frustration	Young children often experience frustration. For example, when they cannot make themselves understood they may express their feelings by hitting pushing and biting.
Stress	Stress is something that children can experience as well as adults. For example a lack of routine and events like moving house and new babies. Biting is one way to express feelings and relieve tension.

Useful Strategies

Which strategies are useful will be determined by your observations and the age of the child.

But always think of dealing with biting in 3 ways.

- What do we do to avoid situations where children are more likely to bite?
- What do we do when biting doesn't occur?
- What do we do when it does occur?

What do we do to avoid situations where children are more likely to bite?

- ✓ Give a child who is exploring or teething a teething ring or safe toy to chew on
- ✓ Check that the child is getting enough sleep
- ✓ Deploy adults to help children share those favourite/new toys
- ✓ Use your observations to minimize these situations generally e.g. lining up kept to minimum
- ✓ Look at why children bite related to developmental levels

What do we do when behaviour doesn't occur?

- ✓ Give children lots of attention for doing the right thing
- ✓ If a child is going through stressful time give child support, structure and affection
- ✓ Provide activities that may relieve tension e.g. rolling/pounding play dough, water play
- ✓ Directly teach and model sharing, turn taking and being gentle
- ✓ Praise other children who are being gentle
- ✓ Use dolls and soft toys to show what we mean by gentle
- ✓ Model alternative strategies e.g. for a child who bites when children in his way encourage a non verbal child to beep like a car
- ✓ Read stories around biting and talk about them generally
- ✓ Use puppets to discuss biting and its effects
- ✓ Establish nursery promise e.g. We are kind and discuss what this means with the children
- ✓ Tell parents about your rules and your plan for stopping children biting

