



## Biting policy

(updated 17 September 2019)

### Background

It is not unusual for children to go through a biting phase, typically between the ages of 18 months and three years, and there is no developmental significance attached to it. Children may bite more readily when they are tired, or if there are changes at home. Reprimanding biters, either verbally or through visual cues has no effect and may even exacerbate the behaviour. There is a compelling link between language development and the cessation of biting.

### Reasons for biting

A bite can be accidental, a result of the child's exploring. The child may get pleasure from the act of biting. It may arise from competition for a piece of equipment, or be the result of a frustration that the child is not yet mature enough to communicate. In rare cases, it may indicate a mental condition such as autism. More simply, it might just be a case of wanting attention

### Procedure for bitten child

Reassure the child and bring them to a state of calm, distracting them, and engaging with them, as necessary. Once calm, examine the bite to determine its severity, and photograph it. If the skin has been broken, apply first aid as appropriate and immediately advise the parents. If the skin is not broken, and the child is not distressed, examine the area again after, say, 30-60 minutes to determine whether the bite mark is still visible, or bruising is occurring. If it is, contact the parents to explain the situation and advise them whether to collect immediately or wait until normal collection time. The bite should be registered in the Incident Book.

### Procedure for biting child

Remove the child, without emotion or reprimand, from proximity to the bitten child, and, if necessary, from other children. If the child is over three (and 'conscious') communicate, in an age-appropriate way, that biting is not acceptable, and then re-direct the child's activities. Do not punish the child, either at home or at school. Rather, deny them the immediate goal or item which led to the bite, and deny their action (ie the biting) any attention. If appropriate, encourage interaction with the bitten child to



express remorse or show an act of kindness. Should that act of kindness involve, for example, helping to tend to the bite, be aware that the biting child may enjoy that process to the extent that it acts as an incentive to bite again.

If the child is under three, and 'unconscious' it is very important that they are just re-directed and no consequence is put in place. There is no need to talk to the child about the bite, or ask them to be gentle, or request they apologise. Just move them to a different area, redirect their energy in which ever way is appropriate, and keep close to them so it doesn't happen again. If there was a 'reason' for the bite, for example wanting a toy, or feeling angry, then make sure you do lots of role-play around the correct behaviour. Using puppets is a good way of doing this. Get them to practise saying 'may I have a turn' or 'I'm feeling angry'. This shouldn't be practised straight away, but often over the following days.

Increase observation on the child to try to determine any underlying reason, or trigger, that may be leading to the biting behaviour. If triggers involve disputes over equipment, consider increasing the resources available. Ensure positive reinforcement for **not** biting ('I can see you really wanted that toy, but you are waiting for your friend to finish – well done'). Consider whether the child needs extra help in socializing or collaborating. Consider whether there are elements in the environment that could be adjusted to reduce unnecessary stress for the biter. Carry out a risk assessment to protect other children in the nursery.

### **Procedure for parents**

Depending on the severity of the bite, either advise the parents immediately, or on collection. Do not offer, or confirm, the identity of the child, despite the fact that the bitten child will probably name them. Note: it is not unknown for the bitten child to name a different child, sometimes one who is not even at school that day. Under no circumstances should parents assign blame to other parents, or seek to advise them to chastise their child. Such behaviour will only make a difficult situation much, much worse. Reassure the bitten child's parents that measures are being taken to prevent a re-occurrence, and discuss those measures openly and comprehensively with them. Seek an early meeting with the biting child's parents to discuss a shared approach, for both school and home, to mitigate their child's behaviour.