

# Biting

## General Information:

Biting can be quite common in nurseries as many children pass through it as part of their **NORMAL** stage of development during the younger years of their lives.

Children bite for a number of reasons, most of them are not intentionally malicious.

**They're in pain.** When babies bite, typically it's because they're teething.

**They're exploring their world.** Very young children use their mouths to explore, just as they use their hands. Children of this age aren't yet able to prevent themselves from biting the object of their interest.

**They're looking for a reaction.** Part of exploration is curiosity. Toddlers experiment to see what kind of reaction their actions will provoke.

**They're craving attention.** In older children, biting is just one of several behaviours used to gain attention.

**They're frustrated.** Biting, like hitting, is a way for some children to assert themselves when they're still too young to express clearly.

## If your child is biting

### What can be done to help discourage this behaviour?

There are a variety of things that can help discourage biting. It helps to:

Adopt **age-appropriate expectations** of behaviour based on his or her current skills and abilities.

Make sure the child's **routines** are predictable and consistent. At meal and bedtimes, try to do things in the same way and at the same times. Young children thrive when they know what will happen next.

Offer **activities and materials** that allow the child to relax and release tension. Offer playdough, foam balls, bubbles, soft music to release emotions.

Provide **items to bite**, such as teething rings or clean, wet, cold washcloths stored in the refrigerator. This helps children learn what they can bite safely, without hurting anyone else.

## How should you respond if your child bites?

While every situation is different, here are some general suggested responses:

### Infants

Infants' learn about the world around them by exploring with their hands, eyes, and mouths. But infants often need help to learn what they should and shouldn't bite.

If an infant takes an experimental bite on another child or adult, **stay calm** and use **clear signals** to communicate that it is not okay for one person to bite another. A firm "no" or "no biting!" is an appropriate response.

### Toddlers and Pre-schoolers

Toddlers have many strong emotions that they are just learning to manage. They may bite to express frustration or because they lack the language skills needed to express their feelings.

### Follow the steps below with toddlers:

If you see the biting incident, get down to the children's level. In a serious, firm tone make a strong statement: "No biting. Biting hurts"

Respond to the child who was hurt by **offering comfort** through words and actions: "Oh dear, your poor thing." The child who did the biting can help comfort the bitten child - if both children agree.

Finally, **talk to the child** who did the biting. Maintain eye contact and speak in simple words using a calm, firm tone of voice.

Try to find out what happened that led to the incident. Restate the rule, "Biting is not kind."

### **Things that you may wish to consider**

As you watch your child play, you may begin to anticipate when a bite might occur.

The following questions can guide you in identifying the kinds of situations that may lead to biting:

- What happened right before the bite? **Pay attention to signals**. Stay close and step in if your child seems ready to bite.
- Who was the child playing with?
- What was the child doing?
- Where was the child?
- Who was caring for the child?

### **Support**

If your toddler is going through a phase of biting or has been bitten, our BLS Team will be happy to offer support and guidance to ensure that there is consistency between home and the nursery. They will work with you to help think of strategies which may work for your child; these can be, in the beginning, trial and error. There are also External Agencies who can offer support such as your Local Children's Centre, Health Visitor and GP.

It is important to remember you are not alone and many other parents will be experiencing similar, if not the same, kinds of behaviours in their child too.