

A Parent's Guide to **Biting**



Discovering that your child has been bitten, or indeed that your child has bitten, can be very distressing for parents. This is a very natural occurrence in a child's development and does not reflect badly on either the parent or the child.

Biting is a habit found mostly in children between the ages of 12-36 months. It is not a premeditated, spiteful act, but simply a common impulse at this age.

Children usually discover biting by chance, at around 12 months of age when chewing is normal teething behaviour. At around 2 to 3 years of age, children may bite when they feel frustrated or want something from another child. Biting is a primitive form of communication. After age 2, biting may become a deliberate way to express anger or intimidate others.

Younger children may bite for different reasons and these are described below

The Experimental Biter – experimental biters may simply want to touch, smell and taste other people to learn more about their world. This type of biter may also be motivated by teething pain.

The Frustrated Biter – some biters lack the skills to cope with situations such as the desire for an adult's attention or another child's toy.

The Threatened Biter – some children, feeling they are endangered, bite in self-defence. They may be overwhelmed by their surroundings and bite as a means of regaining control. Children may become threatened by situations such as newly separated parents, the death of a grandparent or a mother returning to work.

The Power Biter – some children experience a strong need for autonomy and control. As soon as they see the response they get from biting, the behaviour is strongly reinforced.

How the Nursery deals with biting

Depending upon the type of biter, the following procedures are followed to prevent such incidents occurring:

The Experimental Biter – this is often motivated by teething pain and a firm “no” is used along with the child being offered suitable things to chew, i.e. teething rings and teething biscuits.

The Frustrated Biter – this is most often found in the toddler age range where language is limited and children seek other ways to express themselves. Again, a firm “no” is used and the child may be removed from the group situation for a few moments.

The Threatened Biter - in this case the nursery staff, wherever possible, intercept to prevent incidents occurring. Again, a firm “no” is used and the child may be removed from the group situation for a few moments.

The Power Biter - most commonly found in children over the age of 2. In this instance the biter is given alternative choices to gain praise. In the event of a bite occurring, the child is removed from the situation and staff will discuss their actions.

The way we deal with a biting incident depends on the circumstances, and these guidelines are followed in dealing with children who are biting:

- If it is a minor nip in times of excitement, a gentle warning is all that is needed.
- If it is repeated, premeditated and a stern warning has been ignored, then we use time out to register the limit of acceptable behaviour. Although it is impossible to eliminate biting, staff familiarise themselves with ‘biters’ in order that a close eye can be kept on these children.
- If biting is consistent then senior staff will discuss this with parents so we can work together to remedy the situation.
- In all cases, staff record the details on an Accident/Incident Form. This is then used to evaluate any patterns in the behaviour.

How Parents can help

You can help by following the same procedures at home and reporting incidents so we can be aware of potential biters. The Nursery policy does not allow staff to divulge who the ‘biter’ is, to protect the child and the parents.

Parents of ‘biters’ can feel guilty and those of the bitten very protective, however, you should always remember that this is a normal stage in some children’s early years and will pass in time.

It is very important that you feel confident and happy leaving your child in our care. Therefore, if you have any concerns, please talk to the Nursery Manager or your child’s Key Person.