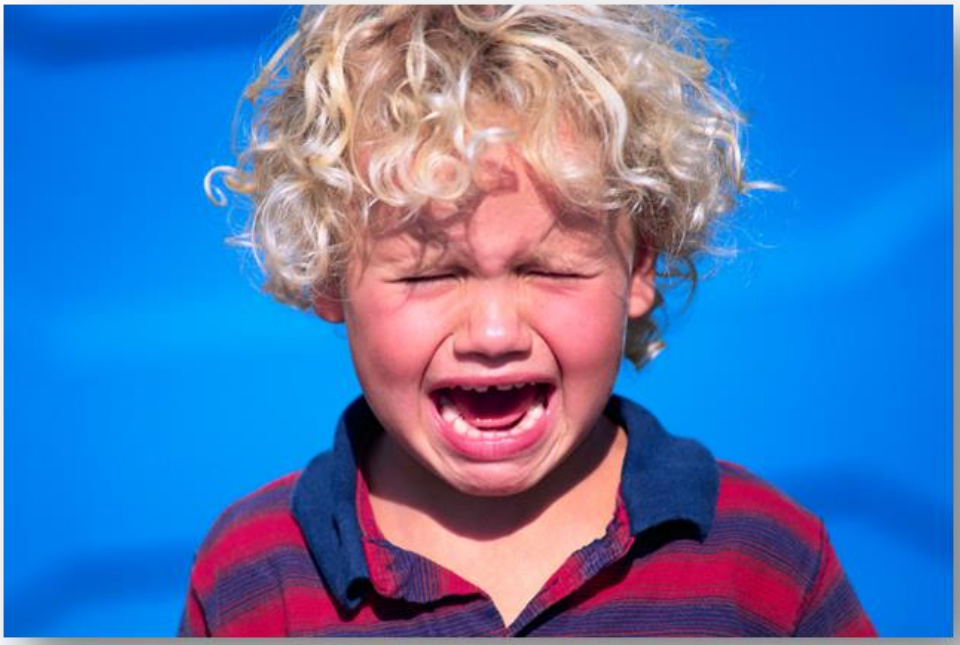
BARNET EYSEND

HOW TO DEAL WITH

BITING

A guide for Parents/Carers and Early Years Practitioners



Barnet Early Years SEND Advisory Team is committed to supporting early year's settings to move to more inclusive environments for children with a variety of special educational needs and disabilities. This Document has been produced by Barnet Early Years SEND Advisory Team.

How to Deal with Biting: A Guide for Parents/Carers and Early Years Practitioners

Introduction

With young babies, biting does not have anything to do with aggression, but comes naturally. When teething, a baby will chew on anything and everything, including you! However, as children become older, biting can be used as a way of communicating, especially emotions. Toddlers are impulsive by nature, and will quickly resort to physical methods to try to get what they want or need.

If you have found a particular approach does not work, stop using it. We can often waste time and emotional energy repeating 'discipline' type methods that keep on failing e.g. time out.

Reasons for Biting

Teething aside, children may bite for a number of reasons including:

- **Curiosity**
  Toddlers may bite to see what their friend's arm tastes like, or to see the reaction.
- **Communication**
  A child who has not yet developed their social communication skills may bite to indicate they would like some interaction.
- **Frustration**
  Instead of hitting another child with whom they are fighting, a child may bite them. Or if things are not going their way, toddlers may get very angry and frustrated and lash out by biting.



- **Copying**
  Children who see another child or adult biting may think that this is a good idea.
- **Seeking attention**
  Biting is a good way of getting others to take notice, even if the attention gained is negative.

Stopping a child from biting

Stopping a child from biting is not easy. It needs you to be very consistent in your handling of it. Biting is common behaviour among young children. Don't worry that the child is doing anything unusual or extreme. The child will learn not to bite in time, and you can help them by being very clear, very firm, and very calm when they do it; and very warm and full of praise when s/he doesn't. Modelling appropriate language and actions to initiate interactions will provide the child with the skills needed to develop their social communication skills.

Keep an eye on the situations in which a child bites - is there a common thread to them? (e.g. same time of day, wanting a toy from another child, wanting to play with another child etc.) If you can identify the situation that the child will bite in, you can try the following:



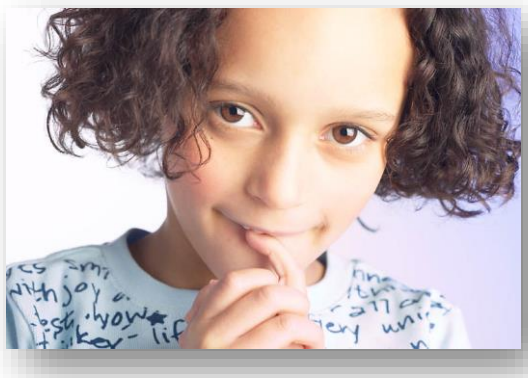
- **Supervise the child more closely during these times.**
- **Try to intervene before the child bites and offer alternative strategies through modelling e.g. ask the other child for a turn with the toy.**
- **Adjust the child's schedule if you think they might be tired.**
- **Try not to panic and overact. This might frighten the child or prove their theory that "If I bite, they will take notice!" Do react, but in a calm and clear manner.**

If a child bites you

Show your disapproval by putting them down immediately and moving away from him. If they have hurt you, say so. Very firmly and calmly, say something like: "No, we do not bite! It hurts and it's not nice!" Then walk away.

If you make a big fuss, children are unlikely to carry on listening and may find great entertainment value in watching adults getting worked up. By staying low-key, very clear, calm and firm, children aren't rewarded with added attention for inappropriate behaviour. They also realise that you are in control of the situation, not them.

If a child bites another child



The same applies, but also remove the biter immediately, and comfort the other child. Or, better still, leave the biter where they are and calmly remove the victim, so that the biter doesn't receive extra attention for biting. As you do so, tell them firmly that they have hurt another child and that they are not to bite, then walk away. Many parents/carers and practitioners have reported success with this approach.

Remove child to another activity.

The concept of 'Time Out' is not recommended, however removing the child to a new situation/activity shows them clearly their behaviour is not acceptable. Remember to

- **remain calm,**
- **use minimal language and**
- **simply take the child by the hand and walk them to the alternative activity.**

Avoid sitting with the child at this time as this may reinforce the notion 'if I bite, I get undivided 1:1 attention'. After a minute or two, ask the child if they would like to return to their friends but as soon as there is any repetition of the behaviour, follow the steps above. This is where you will need to work as a team to support each other as the child will more often than not test your resolve and being consistent in the early stages of this approach is crucial to its success.

Important points

- **Alternative activities**

The 'alternative activities' should be fun, engaging, and educational. This is not a punishment but simply a way of showing the child that biting others is not nice and there are much better ways of indicating need and emotions.



- **It's the biting that's not nice, not the child.**
  Always make it clear that it is the biting that it is not nice, not the child. It is very easy to damage young children's self-esteem by telling them that they are "naughty" or "bad".
- **Model and support appropriate behaviour.**
  Take every opportunity to model and support appropriate interactions/behaviours between the children.
- **Discuss your concerns.**
  With the child's parent/carer. Is the behaviour seen at home? Have there been any changes – new baby, bereavement, separation etc.
- **Praise what they do well**
  Remember to take every opportunity to praise what they do well. Care must be taken not to stigmatise the child in the eyes of their peers.

General Important points

- **Reward positive behaviour**
  Try to have as many relaxed and fun moments together as you can. This will help the child to see how rewarding positive behaviour is, and also make the removal of attention more obvious when they bite. If they get through a day, or even part of a day, without biting, tell them how pleased you are and why. That way the need to bite will reduce as the emotional need is fulfilled through the positive reinforcement.
- **Never bite back.**
  Basically this is physical abuse and not acceptable at any time. It also sends a very confusing message (i.e. biting is

OK if provoked; you are not allowed to bite, but I am). Young children often do not yet understand the feelings of others and will not make the link between their bite and the pain you inflict on them. It might stop some children in their tracks, but they are stopping out of fear of being bitten themselves if caught. They may still bite if they think they can get away with it. Perhaps some children don't realise that biting hurts, but we can tell them and show that in our responses. We don't need to bite to get the message across.

- **Acknowledge their feelings.**
  If a child bites because they are angry or frustrated, it will help to acknowledge their feelings as well as telling the no (e.g. "I know you're angry because you wanted Shareen's toy, but you know you mustn't bite.") That way, they will begin to understand that feeling angry is fine but there are more appropriate ways to express these feelings. These should be modelled by the adults.

- **Tone of voice**
  Even very young children will understand your tone of voice. You may have to repeat rules and explanations many times, but with time and patience, the child will understand.

- **If a child doesn't grow out of biting**
  Usually by the age of three most children have grown out of biting. If the child continues to bite and you think that is part of large picture of challenging behaviour, it might be wise to seek the support of a professional. In Barnet, you can contact your SEND Advisor. They will support you to make a referral to other professionals, if appropriate and explore possible strategies to support the child.

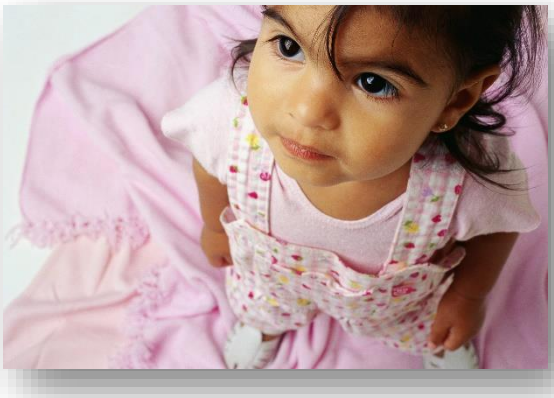
- **Effect on self-esteem**
  Remember, children who bite often become very isolated from their peers, for obvious reasons! However, this in turn will inevitably impact on their self-esteem and so the role of the adult is crucial in enabling the child to develop appropriate relationships with their peers - always praising positive actions/interactions whilst reacting calmly but firmly to the less positive. If staff are aware that a 'blame culture' is developing, this should be dealt with immediately – it's interesting to note how many children become the scapegoat even when they're not there!

Parents/Carers: If your child has been bitten by another child

- **It is being dealt with**
  Rest assured that staff are dealing with the biting. Biting is always taken seriously and staff do their best to ensure that is stopped as soon as possible.

- **No names**
  Please do not ask staff who has bitten your child – you do not need to know their identity.

- **Don't complain to the parents/carers**
  If you do know who has bitten your child, please do not complain to the other parent/carer – they are likely to be as distressed as you are about the biting. Try to put yourself in their place. All young children are potential biters.



- **Reassure your child**
  Reassure your child that it is not personal (as staff will also do). However, if your child has been bitten a number of times, discuss your concerns with staff. It may be possible to make temporary arrangements to minimise contact with the particular child.

- **No exclusions**
  Please do not expect staff to exclude the biting child. Staff in Barnet early years settings are committed to meeting the needs of all children.

Dealing with Biting

A Summary Checklist of Action for Early Years Settings:

The setting should:

- ensure that your Behaviour Policy includes information on how your setting deals with incidents such as biting that can be explained to parents/carers when they register. It will prepare and reassure them that biting is a natural part of some children's development. It should include clear procedures, so that parents/carers are aware that all families are treated equally and have confidence in staff.

- state clearly that, like all nurseries in Barnet, you are an inclusive nursery and will not exclude children because of the difficulties they are having.

- also state clearly that you are aware that it happens, you don't ignore it and do take steps to deal with it in a sympathetic and supportive manner.

Steps to take when there is an incident:

- respond quickly but calmly, separating the children and comforting the child who was bitten, giving them plenty of attention.

- calmly and briefly make clear to the child who has bitten, that "We don't hurt others", even if they don't yet understand the actual words, they will understand your tone of voice and facial expression.

- if the child was angry and you know why, acknowledge their feelings at the same time. Give minimal attention to this child, they may be tempted to bite for the reaction that they get.

- quickly return to normal, focussing on playing happily together.

Steps to take following an incident:

- **Log the incident**, noting the time of day and context.

- I**nform both parents/carers separately and in private, on the day, without identifying the other child.** Reassure them that you are following your procedures, but cannot guarantee that it won't happen again. Suggest to the parent of the child that has bitten, that there is no point them bringing it up later at home. Also, they should never bite the child back in order to show them what it feels like, explaining that if adults do it, it will appear to the child that it's acceptable – and quite simply is **physical abuse.** Similarly that playing 'biting games' e.g. nibbling toes or monsters should be avoided!

If it continues

- provide additional adult support on a temporary basis.
- Undertake regular Focussed Observations, noting the proportion of appropriate and inappropriate interactions the child has.
- use Star or ABC charts to look for patterns and/or triggers, (e.g. transition times, hungry, tired, frustrated, angry, limited language, particular child, particular equipment) and find ways of minimising how the child is affected.
- teach the child appropriate ways of gaining the attention of other children, focussing on the word "Gently" and modelling appropriate interactions.
- give the child plenty of attention when they are behaving appropriately especially if they try to be gentle, or approach another child appropriately.
- teach the child simple language to express themselves, focussing on negotiating and requesting.
- mention it to all staff so that the procedure is followed consistently.
- Remaining calm is key – you may want to work as a team so that you can indicate to another member of staff that you would like them to take over – it can be quite stressful to remain 'calm' – we all have our limits and so it is better to call on a fellow member of the team to take over in order to maintain a consistent approach.
- Remind ALL adults that it will stop!