



When Biting Occurs

In even the best childcare program, periodic outbreaks of biting occur among infants and toddlers, and sometimes even among preschoolers. When it happens, it can be frustrating and very stressful for children, parents and teachers. Biting, however unfortunate, is a **common and natural phenomenon with virtually no lasting developmental significance**. It is not something to blame on children, parents or teachers, and there is no quick and easy solution to it. We would like to assure you that each and every occurrence has our priority attention.

Children bite for a variety of reasons: simple sensory exploration, communication attempts, seeking to be noticed, "cause & effect" experimenting, or intense desire to have a toy.

HERE IS WHAT WE DO TO TRY TO STOP THE BITING BEHAVIOUR:

1. When a child is bitten, we **avoid any immediate response that reinforces the biting**, including negative attention. The biter is gently removed from the situation, with no show of emotion. The teacher focuses on the victim with caring attention. The biter is talked to on a level that he/she can understand, and the teacher tries **to interpret what the biter wanted to communicate and models an appropriate way for the child to get his/her wants and needs met**. The child is then redirected to another activity.
2. We look intensively at the context of each biting incident for patterns. We look to see if there was crowding, over stimulation, too much waiting or any other reason for frustration. In addition, we ask ourselves if the biting child is getting enough attention, care and appropriate positive reinforcement for not biting or does the biting child need help becoming engaged in play.
3. We try to adapt the environment to minimize crowding and reduce frustrations. When it makes sense to do so, we provide a biting ring or toy for children to use at the centre.
4. We make special efforts to protect potential victims. We try to always be in arms reach of the biting child so situations can be redirected before harm is done.

PUNISHMENT DOESN'T WORK TO CHANGE THE CHILD

Neither delayed punishment at home, which a young child will not understand, nor punishment at the centre, which may make the situation worse, helps. What can help is adapting the environment, teaching the child the appropriate way to get their wants and needs met, and making sure that the child's needs and communication attempts are met with understanding.

BALANCING PROGRAM COMMITMENTS TO ALL THE CHILDREN

Some children become "stuck" for a while in a biting syndrome and this can be frustrating for the parents of the victim and the biter. It is frustrating for the parents of the victims that we are unable to "fix" the child quickly or willing to terminate care for the biting child. We make every effort to extinguish the behaviour and to balance our commitment to the family of the biting child and to that of other families. The name of a child that is biting is not released; the information is kept confidential because it can make an already difficult situation more difficult. We strive to make the program work for all children. When biting occurs, we are all challenged to maintain a broader perspective and to pull together as we journey through the toddler years.