

Thrive's Guide to.....The Biting Phase

Biting in young children is often a cause of concern for parents. We find that this is a relatively common behaviour and form of communication for young children. It is quite usual for babies and toddlers to express their emotions by biting others. This is because at this age, children are not aware of or in control of their emotions and are developing the important skill of self-regulation.

Babies

Theories suggest that when babies bite, this is more than likely a form of exploration – infants use their mouths to explore because it is one of the most developed parts of their bodies. Babies are naturally impulsive and lack self-control; some babies may bite because there is something there to bite, others may bite when they are over-stimulated or excited, or it may be a simple case of teething.

Toddlers

With toddlers, it is more likely that biting is a form of communication. Toddlers seldom plan ahead, but rather see and act on what they are experiencing at that moment. Toddlers may also bite when they experience a stressful event such as routine changes or to demonstrate frustration or independence.

Pre-school

Children of pre-school age love to copy others and use imitation in their play. Therefore, if they have observed a sibling, peer, or another child bite, they may copy them. Stress can also become a trigger for children, such as changes at home, within a routine or after a significant event resulting in occurrences of biting.



Biting is rarely a result of anger, aggression, or personal dislike. Strategies to prevent biting at nursery include adopting a 'pre-empt to prevent' approach through the following:

- Promoting children's self-regulation through co-regulation (see our policy)
- Provide environments which are appropriate in challenge and safety for the children accessing them
- Consider space and duplicate resources when planning activities to avoid potential conflict between children
- Share stories regularly with children such as 'Teeth are not for Biting' during small group times
- Use information from home to understand how children are feeling at nursery
- Provide resources such as sensory activities, teething rings and other resources.
- Ensure children have access to food when they are feeling hungry

Where a biting incident has occurred, adults will:

- Comfort the child who has been bitten first
- Speak to the child who has bitten in an age-appropriate manner using terms such as 'we don't bite', 'biting hurts' and 'no biting'
- Reflect on the situation and make adaptations where required, depending upon the trigger, this may include deployment of staff to reduce further incidents
- Speak to the parents of both children, without disclosing any names of children
- If biting becomes a concern, more frequent observations must take place to gather the full picture of children's needs and identify any triggers. An ABC's chart will be completed followed by a 'Self-Regulation Support Plan'. These will be shared with parents to ensure that nursery and parents are working in partnership, using similar strategies
- Children should not be forced to 'say sorry' or hug other children following a biting incident as this may not be appropriate.

The biting phase can be an emotive one

We understand that biting can be very upsetting for both the parents of the child biting and the child who has been bitten. Although biting is very common in babies and toddlers; persistent biting should be taken seriously and approached with the same care as any other behaviour that you wish to discourage or stop. We ask parents to work with us sharing any triggers that they notice at home.

Once a child has learned to communicate and increases their use of language, the amount of biting normally decreases. Suddenly children can try negotiating, asking for things and disagreeing with friends as an alternative to biting, all of which are an important part of developing independence.



Keeping us updated about changes at home

Changes in a child's circumstances such as a new baby, moving house, a death in the family or parental separation can often be triggers for biting and so it is important that parents share as much information as possible so that we can help provide the support the child needs.

Our colleagues will never promise families that their child will never be bitten again, instead explaining that they will use many strategies to help to reduce the likelihood of this happening again.

Consistency is key!

It is important that there is consistency in the actions that both we at nursery and parents carry out after the incident or a child may become confused.

We have found the best responses are as follows:

- React promptly; saying in a firm but calm voice “no biting”, making sure you have the child’s attention
- Add a simple message such as “ouch that hurts” or “that hurts mummy”. Avoid lengthy explanations as this may lose the child’s concentration or they may not understand
- A child who has language and understanding can be given an explanation as to how and why we should not bite as it hurts other people
- Focus will be given to the child who has been bitten rather than the child who is biting (if applicable at home)
- Most importantly make sure you remain consistent. Have a chat with your child’s key person to make sure there is consistency between home and nursery.
- Share any stories or strategies provided by nursery at home such as ‘Teeth are not for Biting’.

We understand it can be very upsetting for a parent to find that their child has been bitten, but we ask you to work with us whilst we support the children and families involved through this phase. We will not disclose any information about the child who has bitten, however you can be assured that the parents of the child will be informed, and we will be working with them to discourage the behaviour. Please be mindful that this can take time and we will do all we can to keep all children safe. Following the discussion, parents will be asked to sign a Record of Injury form which will explain where the bite is, and colleagues will explain the incident leading up to it.

Please remember that biting is very common in children under 3, and 1 in 10 children tend to go through a biting phase. If you have any further questions about a biting incident, please speak to the Nursery Manager.

Supporting documents and reading:

- Self-regulation and Co- Regulation Policy
- Thrive Self-Regulation Guidance
- ABC’s chart
- Self-Regulation Support Plan