

1 minute guide: Biting

Why do children bite?

Children bite for various reasons including:

- **Exploration** – some children bite as a tool for learning, to understand the taste or texture of different things.
- **Teething** – some children chew on mouth to gain relief from teething pain. Most children truly do not understand the difference between an object and a human.
- **Cause and Effect** – some children will bite to discover what happens when they do.
- **Attention** – some children bite for attention, even negative attention is better than NO attention.
- **Imitation** – children of pre-school age love to copy others and find this is also a great way to learn. They may see a sibling, peer or older child bite and copy them.
- **Independence** – biting is a powerful way to control others 'It's mine and if I bite you you'll leave it alone' and can be a quick way to get what they want.
- **Frustration** – not having the right words to convey a message can be very frustrating and to vent this anger some children may bite.
- **Stress** – sudden changes in their daily routine, or stressful events in children's lives can cause them to bite to express feelings.
- **Sensory** – some children sensory seekers and physically need the pressure or feeling on their body.
- **Communication** – a major reason for biting is when a child has limited or no verbal communication and this is the only way they can communicate feelings or that they are seeking something, or that maybe someone has done something to them.

How can we identify the triggers for biting?

First we need to look at the triggers and try to pinpoint.

- What? - What happened before or after?
- When? - When did it occur?
- Who? - Who was involved?
- Where? - Where did it happen?

What strategies can we offer to support children who bite??

- If a child only bites at a particular time of day, is he/she hungry?
- If it is always when the adult is with another child and not paying them attention?
- If their home life is unsettled, try to make it as normal as possible for the child.
- If a child bites when fighting over a toy – it may be that the setting buys another – toddlers do not know how to share.
- Tell the child it is not okay to bite – it hurts.
- If the child is angry and frustrated allow them time to calm down and self-regulate before talking with them.
- They will not be listening if they are upset.
- All adults/carers, if possible, should have same approach to biting.
- Be firm and say "NO!" Never shout at a child.

How can the setting work in partnership to support biting?

Working with parents.

- Staff should speak to and support parents/carers around the biting incident.
- Staff should not tell parents which child their child has bitten, or which child has bitten their child. This is to protect both the children involved and their families.
- Ask the parents of the child who has bitten to work with the setting, work on gaining an agreed plan of action for the child in order to gain consistency at home and setting.
- Explain to parents that they should not bite their child back if they bite at home as this form of behaviour management could be seen as safeguarding concern.

The child that has been bitten

After being bitten, staff instantly comfort them and treat any injury with a cold compress applied to the affected area. This process continues until the child has settled and feels comfortable enough to play again.

The child who has bitten

- If the child is old enough explain to them that they have hurt another child and that biting is not acceptable.
- If biting/ attempting to bite becomes a regular occurrence a member of staff should try to shadow the child to minimise the chance of them hurting other children as best they can. See below.

Recording the incidents

- All incidents are recorded on an accident/incident report sheets for both the child who has been bitten and the child who has bitten.
- Staff record injuries in the accident book and ask the parents of the child who has been bitten to sign it when they collect their child that day.
- If a staff has had to physical intervene to stop the incident happening, then this should be recording as physical intervention and shared with parents/carers.

When should you seek medical attention following a biting incident.

The NHS offers a guidance for you to follow if you have sustained a biting injury please click on the link for more information. [Animal and human bites - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/animal-bites-and-injuries/)

Strategies the setting may find useful.

- staff should be able to identify any patterns that may be forming for the child who bites, i.e. if the biting happens at a particular time of day, does it happen for the same reason each time etc. Using this information, it may be possible for staff to identify reasons for the biting and identify a method for preventing the biting i.e. changing a child's routine if it happens when they are tired etc.
- There is no instant cure to biting. It may take time and patience from all parties before the child understands the message that is being conveyed.

REMEMBER

Biting is not anyone's fault. It is a phase of development some children go through, and everyone needs to be realistic about the expectations of the child.

Useful links:

[Biting \(herefordshire.gov.uk\)](https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk)

<https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/downloads/file/3505/biting-information-leaflet-about-why-it-happens-and-how-to-stop-it>

[Behaviour in the Early Years - Biting \(northlincs.gov.uk\)](https://www.northlincs.gov.uk)

[biting-parenting_tool.pdf \(vanderbilt.edu\)](https://www.vanderbilt.edu)

[Biting as a Way to Communicate: Why it Happens and How to Respond \(wonderlandmontessori.com\)](https://www.wonderlandmontessori.com)

[Understanding and Responding to Children Who Bite | NAEYC](https://www.naeyc.org)

[Biting as a Form of Challenging Behaviour | Behaviour Help](https://www.behaviourhelp.org)

[Chewing or Biting Non Food Objects.pdf \(derbyshirehealthcareft.nhs.uk\)](https://www.derbyshirehealthcareft.nhs.uk)

<https://www.bristolearlyyears.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/SEND-Self-help-Biting.pdf>
[t-cpd-1735046445-biting-in-the-early-years-handout ver 2.pdf](#)