



Biting Behaviors Within Preschool Settings

Biting is a typical developmental phase in young children, often starting in infancy and usually decreasing by age three. It can occur frequently when children share space, equipment, and adult attention. The National Association for the Education of Young Children notes that about one in ten infants to two-year-olds engage in biting. As educators and parents, we acknowledge biting as a natural behavior, similar to toileting and tantrums. Our role is to maintain a safe environment and use each biting incident as an opportunity to teach children appropriate ways to manage and express their feelings. Experts emphasize that biting incidents are developmental and not to be blamed on the child, parents, or teachers, but rather addressed collaboratively for resolution.

Is biting behavior normal?

Biting behavior is a normal part of childhood development. It is common for children between the ages of 1 and 3 to bite. However, it is important for parents and caregivers to address biting behavior to prevent it from becoming a habit.

Causes of Toddler Biting

Getting a child to stop biting starts with understanding why they have suddenly resorted to using their teeth. In a majority of cases, toddler biting happens for one of these reasons:

- **Biting helps them learn about the world.** Little children like to feel things orally, it's a way for them to learn about the world as well as a source of comfort. Biting is usually just a form of sensory exploration.
- **It helps toddlers communicate.** Expressing feelings is just plain hard for toddlers because they often can't make themselves understood verbally. Toddlers don't have the language skills to express how they feel, so they bite to create a stir, to express excitement, or to say that they are frustrated, anxious, or bored.
- **They're playing defense.** Sometimes, your little one will have a legitimate gripe. Perhaps another child grabbed their bottle, tripped them, or pulled their hair. Not biting someone when you feel like it requires real self-control, and toddlers don't have that yet. This explains why a lot of toddler biting happens at daycare.
- **They're experimenting with cause and effect.** Ever wonder why so many toys for toddlers are designed to make noise whenever they're touched? Kids this age are discovering which actions provoke reactions. So when your little one thinks, "I wonder what will happen when I bite my friend," they're testing their impact on the world.
- **They're overwhelmed.** Overstimulation is another frequent cause of biting. When your child is tired or a lot is going on, they may be more likely to bite. Meanwhile, a calm, well-rested toddler is less likely to use their teeth, so try following high-energy activities with quiet play or nap time.

How Caregivers Address Biting in a Group Setting

Observation and prevention are crucial in addressing biting behavior. Caregivers should stay alert for signs such as clenched fists or signs of frustration that may indicate a child is about to bite. Prompt intervention is essential—calmly redirecting the child’s attention to a different activity or offering a calming activity like a sensory bin or quiet book can help defuse the situation.

By implementing these strategies, daycare providers and parents can collaborate effectively to prevent biting incidents in young children. Creating a calm environment, maintaining consistent discipline, promoting effective communication skills, establishing predictable routines, and actively observing and addressing potential biting behaviors all contribute to teaching children appropriate ways to express themselves and interact positively with others.

Redirecting Behavior

One of the most effective strategies for dealing with biting is to redirect the child’s behavior. When you see a child about to bite, quickly intervene and redirect their attention to another activity or toy. This can help the child learn to express their frustration or anger in a more appropriate way.

Positive Reinforcement

Another effective strategy is to use positive reinforcement. When a child exhibits good behavior, such as playing nicely with others or using words to express their feelings, praise and reward them. This can help reinforce positive behaviors and discourage biting.

Comforting the Victim

If a child does bite someone, it is important to provide comfort and care to the victim. This can help them feel safe and supported, and prevent further biting incidents. Encourage the child who bit to apologize and make amends, such as giving the victim a hug or a toy.

By using these strategies, you can help stop a child from biting at daycare. Remember to remain calm and consistent, and to provide positive reinforcement for good behavior. With time and patience, you can help the child learn to express their feelings and interact with others in a positive way.

Resources

Teeth are Not for Biting, by Elizabeth Verdick and Marieka Heinlen

No Biting, by Karen Katz

No Biting, Louise, by Margie Palatini and Matthew Reinhart

Little Dinos Don’t Bite, by Michael Dahl and Adam Michael Record

People Don’t Bite People, by Lisa Wheeler and Molly Idle

No More Biting for Billy Goat, by Bernette Ford and Sam Williams