



MCFCCA Workshop BITING Presented By Sandra Hall, President 2009

You've just discovered that you have a pint-sized biter on your hands. Isn't it amazing how those tiny teeth that once caused so much excitement and celebration can now cause so much fear and frustration? Biting, however, is quite common among young children. It happens for different reasons with different children and under different circumstances. Understanding the reason a child is biting is the first step to changing his or her behavior.

Why children bite

EXPLORATION - Infants and toddlers learn by touching, smelling, hearing, and tasting. If you give an infant a toy, one of the first places it goes to is the mouth. Tasting or "mouthing" things is something that all children do. Children this age do not always understand the difference between gnawing on a toy and biting someone.

TEETHING - Children begin teething around the ages of 4 to 7 months. Swelling gums can be tender and can cause a great deal of discomfort. Infants sometimes find relief from this discomfort by chewing on something. Sometimes the object they chomp on is a real person! Children this age do not truly understand the difference between chewing on a person or a toy.

CAUSE AND EFFECT - Around the age of 12 months, infants become interested in finding out what happens when they do something. When they bang a spoon on the table, they discover that it makes a loud sound. When they drop a toy from their crib, they discover that it falls. They may also discover that when they bite someone, they get a loud scream of protest!

ATTENTION - Older toddlers may sometimes bite to get attention. When children are in situations where they are not receiving enough positive attention and daily interaction, they often find a way to make others sit up and take notice. Being ignored is not fun. Biting is a quick way to become the center of attention - even if it is negative attention.

IMITATION - Older toddlers love to imitate others. Watching others and trying to do what they do is a great way to learn things. Sometimes children see others bite and decide to try it out themselves. When an adult bites a child back in punishment, it generally does not stop the biting but teaches the child that biting is okay.

INDEPENDENCE - Toddlers are trying so hard to be independent. "Mine" and "Me do it" are favorite words. Learning to do things independently, making choices, and needing control over a situation are part of growing up. Biting is a powerful way to control others. If you want a toy or want a playmate to leave you alone or move out of your way, it is a quick way to get what you want.

FRUSTRATION - Young children experience a lot of frustration. Growing up is a real struggle. Drinking from a cup is great; yet nursing or sucking from a bottle is also wonderful. Sometimes it would be nice to remain a baby. Toddlers don't have good control over their bodies yet. A loving pat sometimes turns into a push. Toddlers cannot talk well. They have trouble asking for things or requesting help. They haven't learned yet how to play with others. At times, when they can't find words to express their feelings, they resort to hitting, pushing, or biting.

STRESS - A child's world can be stressful, too. A lack of daily routine, interesting things to do, or adult interaction are stressful situations for children. Children also experience stressful events like death, divorce, or a move to a new home. Biting is one way to express feelings and relieve tension.

THIRST OR HUNGER - Many children also bite when thirsty or hungry. Make sure biters have frequent small snacks and remain well hydrated.

LOVE - Many oral children get over zealous in their affection attempts and what starts out as a kiss ends up being a bite, just be ready.

FATIGUE - A tired child can become frustrated easily. Be sure children have a quiet place to escape and regenerate during the day.

WHAT CAREGIVERS CAN DO

USE THE WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, AND HOW METHOD TO PINPOINT THE PROBLEM.

When did the biting occur?

Who was involved?

Where did it happen?

What happened before or after?

How was the situation handled?

TRY PREVENTION.

If you determine that the biting occurs as the result of **exploration** or **teething**, you may want to provide the child with a cloth or teething ring to gnaw on.

If a child seems to bite when **tired** or **hungry**, you may want to look at your daily routine to be sure that he is getting enough sleep and nourishment.

If the biting occurs when two children are **fighting** over a toy telephone, you may want to purchase an extra toy telephone. It does not work to make very young children share. Toddlers don't have the skills to negotiate or understand another child's perspective.

If **attention** seems to be the main reason for biting, try to spend time with the child when she is doing more positive things. Snuggling up and reading a book together or rolling a ball back and forth is so much more fun than receiving a scolding.

If the child is experiencing a **stressful** family or caregiving situation, you will want to make everyday life as supportive and normal as possible. Predictable meals and bedtimes and extra time with a loving adult can help. Often, experiences like rolling, squishing, and pounding play dough or relaxing and splashing in the bathtub are great ways to relieve tension. In painful situations like divorce, it takes time and patience for healing to occur.

TEACH NEW BEHAVIORS.

When a child bites, show the biter with your voice and facial expression that biting is unacceptable. Speak softly but firmly and look directly into the child's eyes.

For example you might say, "No! Sara, it's not okay to bite. It hurts Jon when you bite him. He's crying. I won't let you bite Jon or another child."

If the child is able to talk, you might also say, "You can tell Jon with your words that you need him to move instead of biting him. Say 'Move, Jon!'"

You may also want the child to help wash, apply ice pack, bandage, and comfort the victim.

Making her a part of the comforting process is a good way to teach nurturing behavior.

Whenever the child is out of control, you will need to restrain or isolate her until she calms down. Insist on a "time out" or "cooling off period." Wait a few minutes until things are under control, and then talk to the child about her behavior.

Self-Biting Toddlers & Preschoolers

Why do some children bite themselves?

Biting can be a way to release frustration, anger, or stress.

Children may bite when they don't know how to express themselves.

Children may bite themselves to punish themselves out of guilt.

Sometimes self-biting can be a way to manipulate the parent.

Biting could be a cause of the child being bitten (as a punishment).

Biting oneself can be caused by a traumatic event.

Biting or self-punishment can be a symptom of child abuse.

What can you do to help prevent biting?

Try spending extra one-on-one time with the child if you think he is trying to get attention. (Not immediately following an act of self-biting.)

Play together actively, games that might help the child burn off the steam that might otherwise be kept inside and come out later as a biting incident.

Interrupt the biting or hitting incident. Pick the child up hold him in your lap. Tell the child as best you can that you won't let him bite himself because you care about him and it's your job to take care of him.

Try to change the situation and redirect the child's attention to something else.

If possible, try to watch for this behavior and attempt to circumvent it before it happens.

Teach the child acceptable alternatives. Perhaps, choose a keyword that word help the child express when he's upset.

Praise your child for appropriate behavior.

What not to do?

Don't give the child extra attention or act overly concerned about the bite. Otherwise, self-biting may become a regular behavior anytime the child doesn't get what he wants.

Check your means of punishment. Make sure that your form of punishment isn't too harsh or frequent for the child. The child may be getting too angry about the punishment, unable to think about what he did wrong, and unable to express it.

When will it go away?

While it's true that many toddler/preschool age children do bite, you don't have to wait for the child to "grow out of it". After a week or two of intervention you should see improvement.

Now you have had a BITE

Daycare providers at some point or another are all called upon to handle the behavioral issue of biting between two children.

After the adult reacts in a calm manner and gets the situation under control, the adult is then faced with the difficult and delicate task of informing the parents of the victim and the parents of the biter about the incident.

Informing the Biter's parents

Informing a parent about a child's unacceptable behavior is difficult in any circumstance. When a child has hurt another child it is important to handle the child's parents delicately, but don't skirt the issue. It is important that the biter's parents be informed of the seriousness of their child's behavior. The provider should first discuss all of the good behaviors and/or talents that the child may exhibit. The provider must be very careful not to accuse or place blame directly. Next, explain what has already been done to resolve the issue. In addition, the provider can ask the parents if the behavior is seen at home and what, if anything, has been found helpful in curbing this behavior. At the conclusion of the talk, the provider should end with something positive about the child in question.

Informing the "Victim's" Parents

Informing a parent that their child was harmed at daycare or preschool is also a challenge, but must not be avoided. Provide parents with details about the incident and inform them about the steps taken to resolve the issue. If the issue isn't yet resolved, then the parents should be told how the provider plans to resolve it.

Your facility should have a biting policy that protects the child, reminding the parent about the policies you have in place may help ease the parent's mind.

Biting Policies

This biting policy will not only explain procedural steps for handling biting, but will also explain specific administrative policy with regard to biting incidents. For example, your policy might state that after a child has a second biting incident the child will be removed from the daycare or for one week. After the third biting incident, the child will be removed for two weeks. If a child bites the fourth time he/she will be removed indefinitely.

Having a biting policy in place lets parents know that long term biting that goes unaddressed will not be tolerated.

When To Get Professionals Involved

A pediatrician or health care provider should be consulted whenever the biting results in a child's skin being broken or regardless of the age of the child, if there is a persistent pattern of biting, an appropriate professional should be consulted, such as a child psychologist or child psychiatrist.

If the child is over the age of three, some consultation is in order.

What are inappropriate actions to a biting child?

Biting the child back.

Making the child taste items that are sour or spicy.

Slapping the mouth of the biter.

Encourage the other child to bite the child back.

Call the child names such as "bad", "naughty".

Spank or threaten the child.

The Bottom Line:

Parents may need to seriously evaluate their behavior at home, and change more aggressive behaviors to more gentle caring ones.

Dealing with behavioral issues is a challenge, especially when you want to avoid hurt feelings, fear, or frustration. Be firm, but always be honest and direct.

It is important that the adults involved not react in an emotional manner to biting. Reacting in an emotionally charged manner may inadvertently reinforce the very behavior that you are trying to eliminate.

We must use the situation to teach the child that biting is an inappropriate behavior and must not be done. Saying "no biting people" firmly at the time of the incident can help". He also suggests child care providers distract the child and give appropriate attention to the child when the child is not making an inappropriate bid for that attention

Reacting to biting: "Treat the "victim" and have the biter aid in this process. It should be noted however, the biter should still be firmly but gently instructed that biting "hurts" and it should not continue".

It is also important that childcare providers then protect the "victim" from future aggressive acts by the biter. The biter may have to be separated from all of the children until he or she recognizes the harmful nature of biting.

Experts agree: Never, ever use "biting back" as a technique to control biting. Never bite a child.

It is very important not to let this type of behavior progress. The parents/ providers must address the issue of biting immediately.

A quick and consistent response from parents and daycare personnel can help children who bite learn to express their feelings in words so that they can become better able to control their behavior.

Dealing with biting is a sensitive issue for the children involved as well as those caring for and teaching children, but the way childcare provider reacts is a critical element in controlling biting in the preschool or daycare environment.

