

# CHILD CARE RESOURCE & REFERRAL

Advocating for the well-being of children in child care.

Position Statement 10/2001

## biting

### why children bite

**Teething** Older infants and toddlers may bite because the pressure feels good on their gums and helps relieve teething pain.

**Hungry or Tired:** Sometimes children bite because they are hungry or tired. They may have no other way to tell you how they are feeling.

**Frustrated or Angry:** If a child is feeling frustrated, crowded or angry, biting may be the only way he can tell you and the other children he needs space.

**Attention:** Biting brings attention, whether it is positive or negative. Biting another child will certainly bring the attention a child seeks.

**Boredom:** Children may bite out of boredom if there are not enough toys or activities available.

**Exploration:** Children are natural explorers. They may bite just to see what happens.

**Communication:** Children may bite because it is the only way they know how to get an adult's attention. They do not have the words to tell us what they need or how they feel. Biting always brings an adult to them and gets them attention.

### Biting prevention

**Observe:** Observation is a key strategy to biting prevention. Keep a close eye on the children. Intervene when you see a child becoming angry or frustrated. If a biting incident has already occurred, think about the event that led up to the biting... time of day (hungry or tired), too much or too little activity (frustrated, angry or bored), etc.

**Schedule Changes:** It may be the child needs a mid-morning snack or to go down for a nap earlier. Maybe there needs to be more active or quiet times scheduled in the day.

**Alternatives for Teethers:** If a child is teething, offer a teething ring or cold washcloth.

**Changes to the Environment:** Make sure the children have enough space for physical activity. They need to play without feeling crowded. They also need places to sit quietly without interruption.

**Empower with Words:** Give children the words to express what they want or feel, instead of biting.

**Rotate Activities and Toys:** Offer different activities to keep children's interest. Too many toys may result in them having trouble staying with one activity. Consider putting some toys away for a while.

**Give Extra Attention:** Children love attention. Rather than giving attention after biting has occurred, give attention while the children are playing nicely together. This helps them understand that they don't need to bite to receive attention.

### how to handle biting situations

- Do NOT bite back. Do NOT use lemon juice or Tabasco sauce, or other aggressive actions.
- Let the child know that biting is not okay. In a firm voice say, "No biting! That hurts!"
- Remove the child from the situation.
- Turn your attention to the child that has been bitten. Wash the bite with soap and water. Apply ice to reduce swelling if necessary. Notify the bitten child's parents if the skin is broken.
- Be consistent and firm.

#### Sources:

National Network for Child Care -  
www.nncc.org  
Hewitt, Deborah, *So This Is Normal Too?*,  
Redleaf Press, 1995.

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