



When children
bite!

A resource for Early
Childhood Educators.

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Originally published 1998: Author Yvonne Kilpatrick, Resource Unit for Children with Special Needs

Substantially revised 2012: Dr Anna Bower and Lee Jeffery, Child Australia

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Disclaimer

This resource is based on the most current information available in July 2012. In revising this resource we have referred to legislation and regulations, and reviewed contemporary research. This document should be used as a guide to compliment and develop service's existing policies and procedures. Services should always check the currency of information at the time of use and consider the information in this booklet in the context of their own service.

This booklet can be accessed online at www.childaustralia.org.au



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Introduction

Young children's biting behaviour can be one of the most stressful and divisive issues in early childhood settings. It impacts on everyone in the early childhood community; educators, senior staff, parents, and children. It provokes strong, negative emotions because it is seen as an invasive and personal attack.

Unfortunately there is no magic cure. Traditional responses to children's biting have involved punishment, withdrawal of affection, exclusion and even biting the child back. Today we have a better understanding of children's development and why this behaviour might occur. Biting is generally a temporary problem, occurring during the toddler stage, and rarely continues past the age of three. It can't be eradicated instantly and requires the skill, understanding and ongoing attention of educators and parents.

It is important to understand and inform parents that punishment won't eliminate biting episodes, and that any punishment is detrimental to the child's development and well being. Adults should never respond with anger towards toddlers who are still learning to feel secure and confident. An angry response can damage their growing self-confidence and leave them feeling abandoned and unloved, cause confusion and an escalation of the unwanted behaviour. Toddlers can and will, over time, respond to firm, verbal guidance without anger or withdrawal of affection.



Child Development

Most commonly biting occurs in groups of children aged between one and three years. Across this age span, children experience very significant and rapid social, emotional, physical and intellectual development and gain a wide range of new skills. This can result in a period of challenging behaviours such as biting, scratching, hair pulling, hitting or simply refusing to do anything they are asked. Having several children of this age together increases the likelihood that one of them will demonstrate one or more of these behaviours.

Theorists have given us insight into some of the ways that children learn - by observing others, imitating their behaviour and through concrete experiences. They don't and can't respond to *teaching by telling* as they haven't developed the capacity for such abstract learning.

A toddler's world is complex, particularly in a busy early childhood setting. Although most toddlers understand more than they can say, they have limited spoken language and can get very frustrated when they are not understood by others. This may result in them "communicating" with us or expressing their frustration by biting.

A good understanding of early childhood development is your best tool for responding to biting and other negative behaviours. There are some things that we can't realistically expect toddlers to understand. For example, no matter how many times educators and parents tell toddlers to share, children under three rarely comprehend the concept of sharing. They first need to learn about taking turns. Most toddlers aren't developmentally ready to feel compassion for others or empathy, so telling them that you are sad or angry isn't very helpful. It doesn't give them the information that they need to make sense of their world and learn to behave differently. To help them develop empathy and considerate behaviour, it is better to give them concrete information, for example "*Biting hurts. We don't bite our friends*".

Developmental factors which may cause a child to bite include:

- Frustration from failure to communicate their needs and wants
- Teething
- Oral exploration
- Limited self-regulation or self-control (because they are still gaining these skills)

What can educators do to eliminate biting?

Build their understanding of children's development

Share knowledge of individual children

Have reasonable expectations

Intentionally teach turn taking in small groups (over two's) and considerate behaviour

Give toddlers concrete information e.g. "Biting hurts"

Talk with parents about children's development



The Environment

Children's environments influence their behaviour. When they are actively engaged, they are focused, interested, and much less likely to display challenging behaviour. If they are bored or frustrated, unwanted behaviours such as biting are more likely to occur. Early childhood environments are often noisy, busy places. While children need space for exploration and adventurous "rough and tumble" play, they also need space for quiet play and an opportunity to relax and find peace and calm.

Many very young children find it stressful to be with same age peers for long periods of time and this can trigger biting episodes. Between 1-2 ½ years of age, children engage in solitary, parallel and associative play (where they watch but don't play cooperatively with others). They may have difficulty sharing toys or playing cooperatively and only later develop the ability and desire to do so. They are more settled in smaller groups, in environments where activities and educators are spread out rather than clustered together, where there is a balance of open and closed spaces, and where they can move around freely but safely.

If there are an insufficient number of toys, or limited materials and equipment, young children may compete for their favourite items. It is unrealistic to expect them to wait for their turn. Lack of equipment and resources, or developmentally inappropriate materials can be triggers for biting episodes!

Many early development settings are brightly coloured with lots of material displayed on walls and ceilings. Very bright colours and extensive room decorations can overstimulate children. This can overwhelm their emerging self-control and result in unwanted behaviours such as biting.

Environmental factors which may cause children to bite include:

- Congestion in any one area – too many children in too small a space
- Competition for toys (or for a favourite toy)
- Over-stimulation (too much colour, noise, activity)
- Limited or no quiet areas
- Boredom
- Stress

What can educators do to eliminate biting?

Be aware of children's favourite toys and materials and duplicate these where possible.

Create quiet spaces where children can develop their sense of belonging

Reflect on the environment. Is it too busy? Is it too crowded? Can you set it up in a different way?

Engagement with Others

Children need a familiar environment, with familiar people, to feel safe. This is demonstrated when they settle readily and they have formed close attachments with one (and then more) familiar educators². To build their sense of security, they need ongoing positive interaction with a 'key person', highlighting the importance of consistent staffing.

Educators have a strong and positive role to play in making children feel secure, and role modelling and encouraging positive interactions. Toddlers learn through imitation and will observe how educators talk with and respond to others, and how they set and reinforce appropriate boundaries. This gives them a positive model of how to engage with other adults and children.

Because they learn so much from imitation, if one child in the group is prone to biting, educators may successfully reduce this behaviour in one child only to see another child start biting. This occurs because they have learned that biting is an effective way of communicating and gaining attention. Consistent and responsive engagement with each child is central to decreasing the likelihood of this occurring.

Positive engagement will increase your understanding and responsiveness to each child's attempts to communicate their needs, and alert you to those times of the day when they are most likely to be tired, frustrated or hungry, and least in control of their behaviour. Making time to interact with each child reduces instances of inappropriate behaviour that is intended to gain your attention. This makes biting less likely to occur.

Engagement factors which may cause children to bite are:

- Insecurity
- Competition for adult attention
- Insufficient adult attention
- Frustration from failure to communicate their needs and wants

What can educators do to eliminate biting?

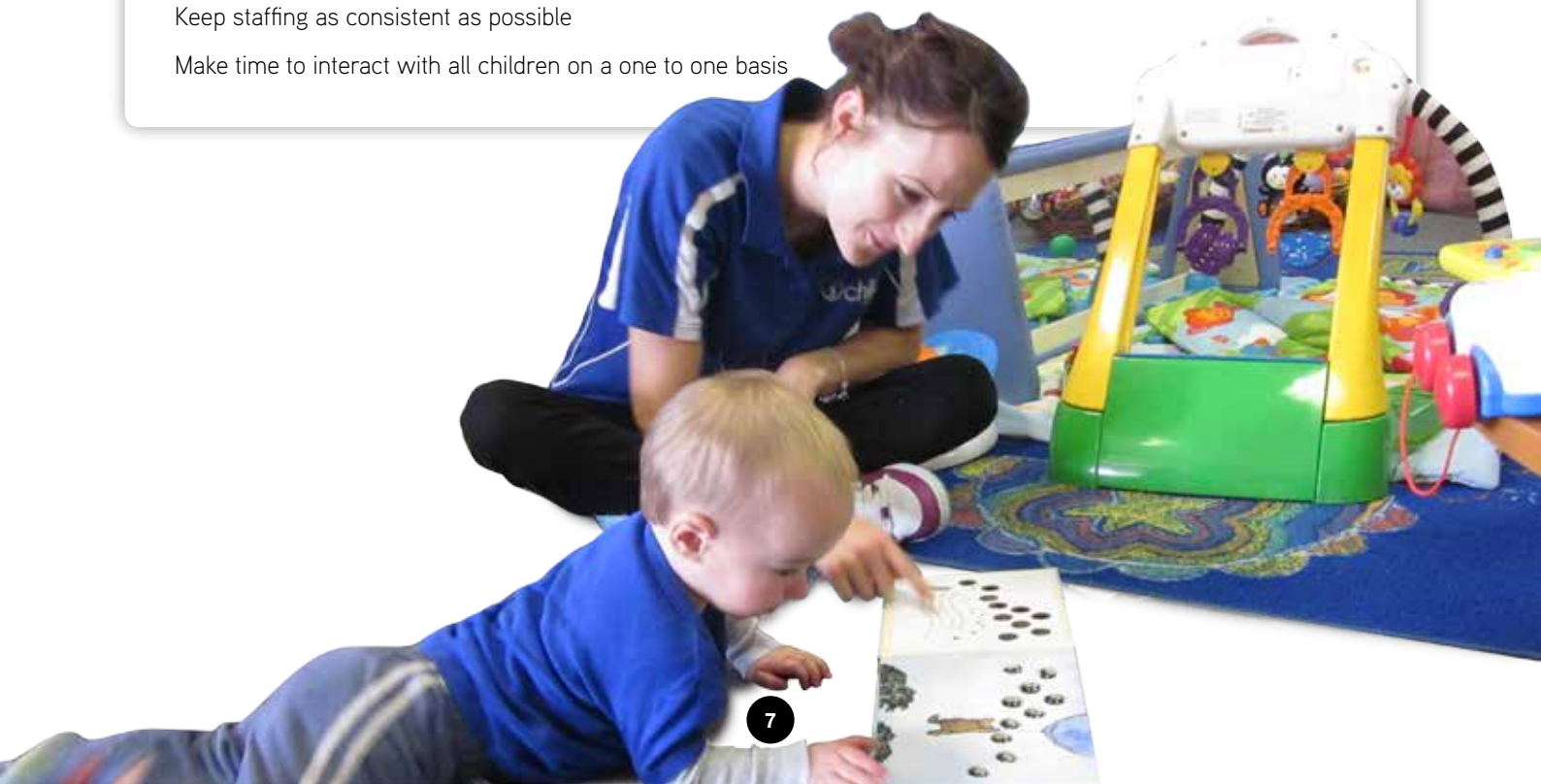
As an educators team, discuss how to strengthen children's sense of security in the environment

Maintain awareness of each child's reactions when tired, hungry or excited

Maintain a consistent routine that minimises surprises for young children. Adjust routines as necessary to meet children's needs so that they eat and nap when they are beginning to get hungry or tired

Keep staffing as consistent as possible

Make time to interact with all children on a one to one basis



Your Service

Having a young child who bites enrolled in an early childhood setting can be a frightening and unsettling experience for everyone. You may be worried about how parents or other colleagues will respond, or may start to doubt your ability to manage the situation effectively. Biting is not an individual educator's problem, but is a problem for the entire Service. New or inexperienced educators require particular assistance to ensure a consistent service-wide approach. Good policies and procedures and regular communication with colleagues will assist you to manage biting behaviour and give less experienced educators the opportunity to learn from more experienced colleagues.

Improving your knowledge of child development, knowing and following your Service's policy and procedures, coupled with support and understanding from your colleagues will help you to respond appropriately. It will also equip you with the professional confidence and skills to deal with both the biting behaviour, and the other children and their families.

Whilst biting is problematic and distressing, with time and a consistent approach, it can be reduced. Professional development, in-house training or peer mentoring may assist you to build your knowledge, skills and confidence in dealing with biting behaviour.

What can educators do to eliminate biting?

Review the Biting Policy (or Behaviour Guidance Policy as relevant)

As a educators team, develop a consistent approach

Mentor and coach less experienced colleagues

Identify training needs

Have a "whole of service" approach





Where to start

To build a picture of why the child is biting, educators need a series of observations to guide reflection and planning. Understanding what triggers the biting is the first step towards reducing the behaviour in your service. When your observations are complete, the Table **Biting: Causes and Responses** (refer to pg number 10) will assist you to reflect on possible causes and plan how best to respond. While acknowledging that biting behaviour is the result of multiple, inter-related factors, this Table outlines common causes together with some responses to help reduce biting

Biting - Causes and Responses

Causes	What might help?
<p>TEETHING: If the child has teeth coming through then they may be in pain and applying pressure to the gums (through biting) may be soothing. Teething may cause the mouth to hurt.</p>	<p>Provide something to bite on to comfort the child, e.g. teething toys, folded cold face washer. Consider the child's age. Older toddlers may be able to bite on harder foods such as apples. Some parents may provide gels, but only use these with parents' approval. Be aware of your policy on administering medication if pain relief is required.</p>
<p>ORAL MUSCLE DEVELOPMENT: As children's muscles develop, they experiment with two opposite ways of dealing with things – <i>holding on and letting go</i>. This theme is repeated in such things as separating from parents, toilet training, learning to share. They do the same "hold on/let go" with their oral or mouth muscles. Biting is an example of "holding on". It is developmentally part of gaining control of a muscle group or cognitive activity.</p>	<p>Help toddlers learn to <i>hold on/let gos</i>. Demonstrate and explore <i>holding on/letting go</i> with activities, e.g. blocks in containers, nesting cups. Structure the environment to ensure opportunities to practice fine and gross motor skills. Structure activities and games to <i>hold on/let go</i>, e.g. holding onto a ball or parcel then letting go (modified pass the parcel), holding hands and letting go, physical freeze and move games (statues)</p>
<p>DEVELOPING INDEPENDENCE: Toddlers are gaining a sense of autonomy – doing things for themselves, making choices, trying to control their world and making demands on adults (and other children). Biting is an excellent way of demonstrating independence or getting control and power over others.</p>	<p>Toddlers must be allowed independence and also need entail consistent, loving and firm limits. Allow children to make choices (for very young children restrict to choice between two items) and express preferences. Have clear limits but set up the environment to support exploration and learning. Set achievable tasks – allow children to succeed and use lots of verbal encouragement.</p>
<p>LANGUAGE/COMMUNICATION: Toddlers are in the early stages of language development. For children who cannot yet talk, biting is a great alternative. It is often a "physical" rather than expressive communication, a language alternative.</p>	<p>Encourage children to develop language skills. Use routine times such as nappy change for 1:1 exchanges. Teach words or sounds/signals. Gain eye contact and use non-verbal communication, body language and signs/signals to re-enforce your words. Plan activities with a verbal component such as stories, finger plays, and songs. Encourage all attempts at expressive language. Be aware of the sounds they use to name objects.</p>
<p>LEARNING CAUSE AND EFFECT: Toddlers begin to explore and learn the relationship between cause and effect from the time they are about 12 months old. Biting is a great cause and effect demonstration. A bite reliably elicits a loud scream or reaction from another child and a reaction from an educator.</p>	<p>Provide alternative ways for the child to observe and explore cause and effect relationships. Use toys that require action to cause a reaction e.g. figures that pop up, cash register, pull along toys. Provide open ended activities such as sand, water, painting, blocks and crayons so the child can "make something happen". Acknowledge and describe this process.</p>
<p>EXCITEMENT/ OVERSTIMULATION: Children can have such a great time running around and enjoying the environment that they become over-excited and overstimulated. Overstimulation can also occur if the visual environment is too colourful or "overloaded". Biting seems to be a form of tension release in such instances.</p>	<p>Plan a balanced day with some quiet time/privacy/space as well as outdoor play times. Help children with the transition from physical play to quieter activities. Use routine and repetition to have a calming effect. Try smaller groups. Consider soothing and relaxing music. Incorporate relaxation with older children.</p>
<p>UNDERSTIMULATION/BOREDOM: If the curriculum is inadequate or insufficiently stimulating, or doesn't reflect their interests, children may bite due to boredom. (Anything to get a reaction and break the monotony!)</p>	<p>Reflect on your curriculum and your environment. Make it balanced, interesting and build on the strengths and interests of each child. Ensure the physical environment is engaging and that all toys and equipment (particularly favourites) are available to children for use (i.e. not put away and unavailable to them). Eliminate waiting and queuing where possible.</p>
<p>FRUSTRATION: The child may be frustrated for a multitude of reasons even in a quality setting e.g. too many challenges, too many children, too little or too much room, not enough 1:1 attention, too many competing demands. Frustration may result from unmet needs, inability to communicate or inconsistent or unclear limits. Children may bite through frustration when their more legitimate/positive attempts to alleviate their frustrations have been unsuccessful.</p>	<p>Model appropriate ways of dealing with frustration. Intentionally teach children to use verbal skills and express feelings. Encourage all attempts to do so. <i>Feelings faces</i> can be useful. Maintain consistent known limits and use positive behaviour guidance. Teach turn taking (my turn your turn). Ensure daily 1:1 time with each child. Reflect on your curriculum and environment, opt for small groups where possible and break up the room into smaller spaces.</p>
<p>SEEKING ATTENTION: The young child may bite to get attention from parents or educators. Some children need more attention than others and don't care if this attention is positive or negative. Behaviours such as biting, scratching and hair pulling can be a great way to be noticed and get an immediate reaction from adults. Some children may receive more negative than positive attention thereby, albeit unintentionally, reinforcing their behaviour.</p>	<p>Ensure that children receive regular positive, warm, nurturing attention. Use routines and transitions. Don't provide undue attention to the child when he/she bites. Ensure all children have alternative ways of receiving attention. Give each child 1:1 time each day. Be aware of and verbally acknowledge positive, busy, curious, helpful, and productive behaviours. Encourage the intent of the behaviour; toddlers don't always get it right! Remember to notice the quiet child too.</p>

Causes	What might help?
<p>LACK OF IMPULSE CONTROL: Generally toddlers lack the ability to evaluate the consequences of their actions and act on impulse. They can appear quite surprised at the result of their actions. Sometimes they bite just because there is something to bite.</p>	<p>Ensure that all educator respond to biting in a consistent way that discourages the behaviour, yet is not punitive. E.g. <i>"Don't bite. Biting hurts."</i> Ensure your response doesn't give excessive attention to the biting child and unintentionally strengthen the behaviour. Model alternate behaviours. Teach children how to respond to a potential bite with a verbal and physical response. Say: <i>"stop, that hurts"</i> (and indicate stop with their hand).</p>
<p>EXPLORATION: Biting is a form of oral sensory-motor exploration. Biting can be part of a child's way of exploring the world in the same way that they may like to look, smell, touch and listen. It helps them learn about their world. Very young children go through a stage of exploring everything with their mouth.</p>	<p>Provide lots of sensory experiences with a variety of surface textures such as hard, soft, rough, and smooth. Have many oral activities – teething ring, soft toys, and blocks. Explore cooking – taste (sweet/sour/salt), texture, colour and temperature.</p>
<p>SOCIAL INTERACTION: Toddlers are learning to interact with their peers and how to approach other children. They often show interest by biting, pulling hair or pushing. This physical communication is particularly common in low or pre-verbal children. Infants relating in this way usually don't understand that they are hurting others – although older toddlers may!</p>	<p>Model appropriate interaction. Teach children words to help them interact. Teach and model joining skills for older toddlers. Ensure sufficient material/equipment, including duplicates, to enable parallel play. Encourage and re-enforce parallel play. Introduce activities such as songs/games/finger-play with hand holding, buddy pairs and introductions/hellos. Encourage appropriate social interaction including sharing toys, hugging, smiling.</p>
<p>ANXIETY: Young children often use biting as a way to communicate or release feelings of anxiety, pent-up emotion, tension or insecurity. It may be in response to the stress around them, either at home or in the care environment. Ask parents if there have been any changes at home or in routines, e.g. recently weaned from the bottle, new baby at home.</p>	<p>Ensure 1:1 time to determine the source of the anxiety. (Collaborate with parents). Allow comforter from home or create a comforter in your setting. Provide relaxing and soothing activities such as water/sand play, soft music, favourite lullabies and quiet songs. Provide calming contact with educators. Try massage or aromatherapy. Keep things predictable so the child feels safe and secure. Encourage attachment.</p>
<p>IMITATION</p> <p>Babies and toddlers learn by imitating others and biting is a behaviour often learned in this way. From around 18 months toddlers can observe behaviour, store it in their memory and perform the act at a later time. This is called deferred imitation.</p>	<p>Model positive interactions with children and toddlers. Ensure that your verbal and non-verbal behaviour is consistent, loving, nurturing, respectful and appropriate for young children to copy. Use positive behaviour guidance, e.g. intervention and redirection, active listening and reflecting, regular but sincere encouragement. Notice and encourage pro-social behaviours.</p>
<p>HUNGER</p> <p>A young child may bite simply because they are hungry.</p>	<p>Ensure that the menu provides adequate and nutritious meals consistent with NHMRC dietary recommendations for children. Check that the child actually eats at meal and snack times. Ask the family about home diet and breakfast consumption. Ensure that water is freely available. Provide additional portion at mealtimes if necessary.</p>



Responding to Biting in Early Education and Care Settings

Biting is a common problem in early childhood settings and all services need to understand how they will respond to and manage episodes of biting. All strategies adopted should be consistent with the service's philosophy and procedures for guiding children's behaviour. A sample policy statement might be:

Our service is committed to assist children to reduce their biting behaviour. We acknowledge that biting is a natural part of young children's development and cannot be eliminated by punishment. We know that it takes time and patience so we will help all children who bite reduce this behaviour to ensure the safety and welfare of their peers. The senior Educators and Educators at this Service are committed to respond appropriately and professionally and we encourage parents to work in collaboration with us to reduce and eliminate biting using positive approach to behaviour guidance.

The following guidelines will assist you to reduce biting incidents in your service:

- Anticipate biting behaviour and intervene whenever possible
 - Know the children in your group
 - Be aware of possible trouble times e.g. new children in the group, children transitioning between rooms, transition from active to quiet play
 - Be aware of problematic groupings of children
 - Position yourself so that you can quickly intervene and redirect the child
- Avoid responses that re-enforce biting
- Indicate that biting is unacceptable but do not punish the child who has bitten
 - Respond immediately (Refer to your Biting or Behaviour Guidance Policy and Procedures)
 - Establish eye contact and speak clearly and firmly
 - Be consistent in your response and ensure all educators use the same words when responding to a biting incident
- Attend to the child that was bitten
 - Reassure and comfort them
 - Attend to any wound
- Limit immediate attention to the child who has bitten so that you don't encourage more biting as a way to gain attention.
 - As soon as possible following the biting incident, acknowledge the child who bit for any positive behaviour unrelated to the biting
 - Acknowledge and encourage all positive interaction with other children
 - Acknowledge and encourage self-directed play
- Document the incident
 - Record details of where, when, who and what happened before and afterwards.
 - Look for patterns or triggers to determine the cause - you may find that the biting occurs in response to overcrowding, frustration, excitement, hunger, tiredness, or teething
- Look critically at the environment
 - Reflect on your program and the way that you have set up the environment
 - Reduce factors which increase the likelihood of the child biting e.g. minimise under-stimulation (e.g. boredom, waiting, queuing, tasks which are too easy or too hard), over-stimulation (e.g. crowding, confusion, constant movement, no chance to calm down after periods of excitement), competition for toys or equipment, sudden changes, and problematic groupings of children
 - Ensure that your curriculum responds to the needs and interests of the children.

- Reflect on the effectiveness of your supervision and engagement with children
 - Did you physically locate yourself to be best placed to intervene and re-direct?
 - Are all children in the group getting 1:1 adult interaction throughout the day?
 - Are particular children monopolising your attention?
- Intentionally teach children
 - Alternatives to biting – use modelling and coaching with lots of encouragement and recognition for positive interaction
 - The difference between “good” biting (food and chewing) and “bad³” biting (people)
 - How to protect themselves from a potential biter
- Engage with the parent(s) of the child who bites and explain your approach to reducing biting
 - Discuss possible reasons why the child might be biting (including home factors that may be contributing)
 - Explain how you will support their child to respond more appropriately
 - Explain your Behaviour Guidance or Biting Policy and Procedures
 - Explain how you will teach other children to protect themselves
- Keep all parents informed
 - While it is not useful to release the names of children who bite, you should inform parents that you consider biting a serious matter and have a strategy in place for dealing with it. You could include this information in a letter (see example on page 18) or speak to parents individually.
 - If you work with toddlers, explain that biting is common in this age group and that it has no lasting developmental significance.
 - Reassure parents that you care for all the children and are actively working to protect their child from harm.
- Observe, monitor and record your progress in reducing biting incidents
 - Congratulate yourself on progress no matter how small
 - Reflect on the effectiveness of changes made to the environment and curriculum and make more changes if necessary
- Ensure that all educators know how to respond (see your Policy and Procedures) and consistently respond in the same way
- “Share the load” with your colleagues
 - Discuss your progress and seek their advice and support
 - Ask for feedback on your environment and alternative ways to set it up
- If biting incidents do not reduce over time, consider professional help and guidance. Contact your Inclusion Support Agency or Professional Support Coordinator for information and advice. See the DEEWR website for contact details – www.deewr.gov.au .

Working in partnership with families

Educators have a very difficult task balancing their responsibilities to all children and parents who use the service. Their responsibility is to the child who bites, the child who is bitten, other children and all of their parents.

If biting becomes a problem, ensure that all parents are kept informed. Before parents become upset about the biting problem, hold a parent meeting or send a newsletter home to let parents know what strategies/techniques they and the educators can use. Parents need to know why toddlers bite, that it is a common problem whenever toddlers are brought together in a group, and that educators will do everything possible to ensure the safety of their children.

The parents of any child who has bitten another child (or educator) should be informed as soon as is possible. Educators and parents should work in partnership to develop a consistent approach that can be used in both the home and early childhood setting⁴.

General Guidelines

- ✓ Establish positive relationships with parents and ensure that there is an established channel of communication. Examples include regular newsletters, e-news, blogs, notice board, parent meetings.
- ✓ Let parents know that there is a problem and what you are doing to resolve it. Give them a copy of the relevant policy and procedures for managing biting in your service.
- ✓ Provide information on child development and positive behaviour guidance
- ✓ Ensure they understand that the service views biting as a serious matter and treats it accordingly.
- ✓ Be honest and provide factual information.
- ✓ Maintain confidentiality about other children and families
- ✓ Listen to parents' concerns and answer their questions truthfully.



Common Questions

Why don't educators just bite the child back?

When adults bite children for biting others, the child learns that it's OK to bite if you are bigger and stronger than the other person. Remember, children learn by observing and imitating. The child may become more likely to bite others – particularly smaller children. Biting them back sends a very confusing message.

What if your solution doesn't work?

If your solution does work, give yourself a pat on the back! If it doesn't work, look again at the environment, the consistency of educators' responses or do more observations to determine if you have considered all aspects. You may need to alter your approach or increase your vigilance. Always stay optimistic – maturity usually brings a positive outcome. If the child continues regular biting beyond 3½ years, bites viciously, or bites and then smiles, seek professional help and/or explore the possibility that this child needs an environment with fewer children and more 1:1 adult attention for a while.

What if nothing works?

Sometimes the best efforts of educators are unable to curb a child's biting. This is so frustrating for educators that many report that they get up in the morning dreading work and feel like a failure. When nothing works we all tend to want to blame someone. Surely someone must be at fault? However, it seems that biting is one of those things that must be endured with every effort made to prevent and minimise occurrences.



Links to the National Quality Framework and Early Years Learning Framework

The suggestions in this booklet are aligned with the principles, practices and learning outcomes of the Early Years Learning Framework and the National Quality Standards. Of particular relevance are:

National Quality Standards:

Quality Area 2: Children's health and safety

Standard 2.3 Each child is protected

Quality Area 5: Relationships with children

Standard 5.1 Respectful and equitable relationships are developed and maintained with each child

Standard 5.2 Each child is supported to build and maintain sensitive and responsive relationships with other children and adults

Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)

The pedagogical practices of the EYLF underpin the suggestions in this booklet. These practices that promote children's learning are:

- Holistic approaches
- Responsiveness to children
- Learning through play
- Intentional teaching
- Learning environments
- Cultural competence
- Continuity of learning and transitions
- Assessment for learning

For more information about the pedagogical practices of the Early Years Learning Framework or the National Quality Framework, visit the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) www.acecqa.gov.au.

Checklist for Responding to Biting in Early Childhood Settings

You might find the following checklist a useful starting point in assessing your current response to biting:

Have you gathered detailed observations over several days?

Are there patterns to the biting (e.g. before meals, inside, certain children?)

Are they teething?

Are you providing alternatives for them to chew on?

Are they simply exploring taste and texture with their mouth?

Can you provide more acceptable oral exploration activities?

Are they acting on impulse with the lack of self control common to toddlers?

Are you on hand to redirect and remind them it is not acceptable?

Are they learning about cause and effect?

Do you give them cause and effect toys and relevant activities?

Is the bite a way of saying 'Hi!, can I join in? You're in my way, this is fun!'

Have you shown them other ways of communicating with other children?
Can they learn more acceptable ways of interacting physically with others?

Is biting their way of demonstrating independence?

Are you providing them with lots of choices and given them special roles?

Are they over-excited or over-stimulated?

Is there a calm period after outside play?
Do you use small groups as a break from the hustle and bustle?
Are there too many activities to choose from?

Are they tense?

Can you include relaxation activities and soothing music?
Are there other acceptable ways for them to release pent-up emotion?

Are they under-stimulated?

Do you put out enough interesting toys and equipment?
Are there sufficient interesting activities to choose from?
Have they had enough time outside?

Is biting the best way to get noticed in your room?

Are educators actually spending time with children and noticing them for behaving appropriately?

Are they frustrated?

Do you have duplicates of popular toys?
Are they given a warning of transitions or are they expected to change suddenly?
Are they shown and encouraged to take turns?

Do parents feel their concerns are being heard?

Do they know the Centre is taking the problem seriously and has strategies in place for dealing with it?

Are there clear, written guidelines for responding to biting in each age group

Do all the educators know exactly how to respond to a biting incident?

Are educators being supported and encouraged?

Sample Letter to Parents

Dear Parents

Biting is a common and upsetting experience in early childhood services. It has a huge impact on everyone – the children, you and all of our educators. We are currently experiencing biting episodes at our service. Unfortunately, there is no magic cure and no-one to blame.

Toddlers bite for a variety of reasons and researchers tell us that it is a normal stage of development. We know that it frequently occurs in early childhood settings because of the age of the children and the additional demands placed on them by group care. No early childhood environment is immune and it occurs even with talented and dedicated educators and a high quality curriculum.

Toddlers use biting to explore and learn, communicate with others, get control of their world and release tension. Although biting may be part of normal development, it is not regarded as acceptable behaviour.

Rest assured we take every instance of biting seriously. We have strategies to deal with biting and take the following action. We:

- anticipate and intervene where possible by observing and analysing the play environment
- do not punish biting behaviour
- let the child know that biting is unacceptable
- comfort and give lots of attention to the bitten child
- teach alternatives to biting by talking about 'good' and 'bad' biting with the child, and
- teach other children how to protect themselves from being bitten.

When we have episodes of biting, it can be very stressful for everyone. We will do everything possible to ensure the safety of your child. If you would like more information on biting in child care, our policy and procedures, or the strategies that we use, please ask (nominated person).

We encourage parents to work with us cooperatively to guide a biting child and other children safely through this early period of development. I know that we can all work together to get through this difficult time.

Yours faithfully,

.....

(service owner/manager/coordinator)

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- Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Training (2009) *Early Years Learning Framework*, Australia
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- Kinnell, Gretchen (2008) *No biting: Policy and Practice for Toddler Programs, Second Edition*, Redleaf Press
- Stonehouse, Ann (2010) *A sensitive issue: Biting in child care*. Putting Children First Issue 33 March 2010 pp. 14-16 retrieved 10 July 2012 from http://ncac.acecqa.gov.au/educator-resources/pcf-articles/sensitive_issue_biting_mar10%20.pdf
- University of Alabama (retrieved 10 July 2012) *Developing empathy: raising kids who care* <http://www.pal.ua.edu/discipline/empathy.php>
- Zero to Three (retrieved 10 July 2012) *Why do toddlers bite? Finding the right response* <http://www.zerotothree.org/child-development/challenging-behavior/chew-on-this-resources-on-biting.html#Why>

Useful Websites

- ACECQA www.acecqa.gov.au
- Child Australia www.childaustralia.org.au
- Early Childhood Australia – www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au
- Zero to Three www.zerotothree.org

Children's books

- Katz, Karen (2002) *No Biting*, Grossett and Dunlap (lift the flap book) 14 pages
- Verdick, Elizabeth (2009) *Teeth are not for biting*, Free Spirit publishing (board book) 24 pages

Foot Notes

- ¹ National Quality System Element 3.2.2. Resources, materials and equipment are sufficient in number, organised in ways that ensure appropriate and effective implementation of the program and allow for multiple uses.
- ² Early Years Learning Framework Outcome 1.1: Children feel safe, secure and supported
- ³ Bad applies to the action of biting – not to the child!
- ⁴ Refer National Quality Standard 6.1 *Respectful supportive relationships with parents are developed and maintained.*

Western Australia Office

PO Box 2562
Malaga WA 6944
Telephone: + 61 08 9249 4333
Facsimile: + 61 08 9249 4366
admin@childaustralia.org.au

Northern Territory Office

PO Box 37645
Winnellie NT 0821
Telephone: + 61 08 8941 4966
Facsimile: + 61 08 8941 6433
pscmt@childaustralia.org.au

Visit our website at:
www.childaustralia.org.au



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