

Recurrent Biting...Let's Get Real.

If a child is biting or attempting to bite often, more intervention is necessary. Once a child realizes that biting is effective, it occurs more often. Children need skills to learn to control the impulse, which takes practice and development of communication skills. Providers and all parents in the child care program need to commit to the process together. Honesty and ongoing communication are vital! The key and challenge to success is to keep the rest of the children safe from injury while working through this very typical developmental challenge with the child.

Ideas for working through recurrent biting or other aggressive behaviors:

- Shadow the child in play. Praise good behavior with specifics "Oh look, you shared the blocks with Harry! That's nice!"
- Intervene quickly to biting attempts. Supervise carefully during group play and be prepared to move quickly. When biting is attempted, remain calm and say, "No biting, biting hurts. Would you like to play with the truck? Can you ask Maddie for the truck? Please, Maddie, can Luke have the truck next?"
- Document every bite and attempt to bite with Who, What, When, Where, Why, and your response to find a pattern.
- Create an incident report for parents and your own records to document occurrences and severity (example on www.stacyboysen.weebly.com)
- Keep the child who is biting close to you when the child appears upset, agitated, or overwhelmed.
- When attending to other children's needs and interests that don't involve your frequent biter, this might be a good time for the child to play with table toys that he/she enjoys. This break from the large group can provide the child with much needed individual play time.
- Provide an ample amount of large, small group and individual play time to avoid overstimulation and frustration.
- Get all parents on board. Biting is a developmental response for many toddlers and young preschoolers. While child care providers are aware of and knowledgeable about children's development, parents may not be. This is a great time to provide family education! Provide all parents with a handout or resources about biting. Let them know that you are committed to keeping all children safe while working through this challenging stage of development. Encourage them to come to you with concerns or questions. (find parent handout on www.stacyboysen.weebly.com)
- We must not reveal the name of the child who is biting for a couple of reasons. First, information about children must remain confidential. Secondly, revealing the name of the child does not help the child, in fact, it harms the sense of community in the child care. Parents feel awkward amongst one another and the "biter" runs the risk of being labeled as "naughty." This label may follow the child for many years and disrupt the self-esteem.
- Pay special attention to "fill the child's bucket. The negative attention, combined with frustrating feelings that often lead to biting, provider stress and response, parent's uneasiness of the situation can all leave a child feeling emotionally depleted. It's important to find ways to help this child feel better inside while they learn new skills. High fives, smiles, and hugs all help. Lots of praise for nice behaviors that you want to see.
- Be aware of your ability to supervise the rest of the children while working through this behavior. While working through this challenging situation, your first responsibility is to keep the rest of the children in care safe from injury.
- Remember, they've only been on this earth for a short period of time and they've only just begun learning about how to interact with others. In these first five years, children are experiencing rapid rates of growth, development and learning. Along with new growth and learning often comes a degree of challenge and frustration. Children need a coach, mentor, cheerleader, and positive guide as they learn social skills and navigate through stages of development. "When little people are overcome by big emotions, it's our job to share our calm, not join their chaos."

It will take hard work and perseverance to see your group through recurrent biting. Many times, when one child starts to bite, another may decide to give it a try, too. As you work through biting, or any other challenging era of child care, you need to be aware of your own stress level and make sure that you are taking care of yourself. Have a trusted friend or mentor to bounce ideas off and gain a fresh perspective. Remember, children rarely enter kindergarten still biting. This will pass and become a distant memory, if you can stay calm and stay focused!

Biting resources: <https://families.naeyc.org/learning-and-development/child-development/understanding-and-responding-children-who-bite> and <http://www.childcareresourcesinc.org/pdfs/TS582.pdf>