BITING POLICY

PRINCIPLE

Biting is a common behavior that some young children experience and it occurs more often amongst children under the age of five and in group situations such as school, nursery, playgroup or other social situations. The need or motivation for one child to bite another is just part of some children's developmental journey, where they do not yet have the words to sufficiently communicate common emotions such as anger, frustration or need.

Evidence suggests that up to a quarter of all very young children will bite others at some stage. We understand that this is a difficult situation for parents/carers whether it is your child that has been bitten or your child that has been responsible for biting others.

Children bite for many reasons and we aim to handle any biting incident with respect and sensitivity for all involved. It is the Nurseries policy to deal with each biting incident on a case by case basis making sure that parents/carers involved are kept up to date with what is happening, but at the same time respecting the confidentiality of the child/ren involved. This ultimately means that we are not able to divulge the identity of any child involved in a biting incident.

This policy has been created to help prepare staff and parents/carers for the possibility of experiencing a biting incident and to help put this into perspective and give some proportion to what can be an upsetting experience for all concerned.

WHY DOES BITING HAPPEN?

Whilst biting is more common at nursery or in other group situations than at home, a biting incident is not a negative reflection on the biter, the staff or the nursery. We have very clear behavioral expectations at the Nursery and children are expected and encouraged to share, wait their turn, be respectful and play happily together.

However, very young children often do not have the coping mechanisms, nor the self-regulation skills which adults and older children have, that help us to diffuse and express our emotions in socially acceptable ways. Young children may resort to hair pulling, hitting and biting which is upsetting for us, but at the same time, developmentally normal. The most common reasons for biting are:

- **Teething and Painful Gums** – swelling gums can be painful and cause discomfort; this can be relieved by biting or chewing.
- **Physical Exploration –** babies and young children explore the world around them using their senses and young children do not always know the difference between gnawing on a toy and biting someone.

- **Seeking Attention –** when children are in situations where they feel they are not receiving enough attention, biting is a quick way of becoming the center of attention.
- **Expressions of Frustration** – children can be frustrated by a number of things, such as wanting to be independent. Unfortunately, they do not have the vocabulary to express themselves clearly and this can sometimes lead to biting as a way of dealing with the frustration.

WHAT IS OUR PROCEDURE FOLLOWING A BITING INCIDENT?

In the event of a biting incident:

- The child who has been bitten will be comforted and reassured and where needed first aid will be administered.
- The bite wound will be washed thoroughly and cleaned with an antiseptic wipe. If the wound is bleeding, it will be allowed to bleed further, before a waterproof dressing is applied.
- If the bite has broken or bruised the skin, parent(s)/carer(s) will then be contacted so that they are aware that their child has been bitten and appropriate action can be taken, involving perhaps a visit to the GP, or in more serious cases, a visit to the Accident and Emergency Department.
- The child that has bitten will also be examined to ensure their own health and safety.
- We will talk to the child who has bitten, age appropriately, and try to help the child understand that there are other ways to express themselves and deal with the situation.
- We will ensure that the biting child understands that such action (the behaviour and not the child) is unkind, and makes the staff and the child who has been bitten upset. Where appropriate, no child in the room will be forced to say "sorry". If they wish to of their own accord that is acceptable. It may be suggested that they give the other child a hug to comfort them or to draw them a picture or ask the other child 'What could you do to make things ok?'
- Incident forms are filled out for both children's individual files on EYlog. The parent(s)/carer(s) of the child who received the bite will be informed and asked to read and confirm they have read the form.
- Incident records will be reviewed by the Key Person, Nursery SENDCo and the Manager to determine if there is a pattern of consistent biting. When biting has become a pattern of behaviour, we will shadow and observe the individual child, looking for 'triggers' and fill in an ABC.
- In certain situations, we may seek professional advice from local behavioural experts or regional special needs coordinators. This will always be initiated in partnership with the permission of parents and carers.

The Nursery Management will work with the parents/carers, the children and the staff to discover why a child is biting. This may have been an isolated incident, but we will always record the incident to examine what happened just before the incident or if there were any behavioural trends.

Once we have identified a possible trigger for the biting incident, we will then make changes to reduce or remove the cause. For example, we may buy duplicates of favourite toys to prevent disputes; or in exceptional circumstances and for a brief period a member of staff may be appointed to provide a few one to one care sessions for the biter, to help with their behavioural needs, and to encourage them to find different ways to express themselves.

We may encourage a biting child to take part in activities which help release frustration such as outdoor play or other physical activities. In certain exceptional circumstances we may also consider moving the child who has been bitten to another playroom, where such an action does not adversely impact the care of either child. This is very much a last resort and will only be considered if evidence suggests a positive outcome for both children.

SUMMARY

The key to addressing any challenging behaviour is a partnership approach. We encourage parents/carers to work with the Nursery team and support any behaviour management techniques and use them at home as well as at Nursery.

Please remember that staff cannot give any information to parents about any other children in the Nursery and cannot disclose who has bitten a child or who a child has bitten. Very young children do not bite maliciously, they bite because they do not know how else to act or react. Whilst most parents/carers understand this, there are cases in which the parents/carers of the bitten child are naturally very angry about the incident. Conversely, the parents/carers of a child who bites also feel very upset and sometimes guilty about the situation. Revealing identities in these emotionally charged circumstances would be unfair and serve no real purpose.

We would like to emphasise that although biting and overly aggressive behaviour is quite common and normal amongst small children, we work very hard not only in dealing with bites when they happen, but also in finding methods of prevention: keeping children active, teething rings, working in smaller groups, observing and shadowing a child and perhaps offering soothing activities designed to lessen aggressive and boisterous behaviour.

If a child's recurring behaviour, such as biting, is having a negative impact on their experience at Nursery, we will work closely with all involved to attempt to resolve these issues. The Nursery staff are well trained and resourced in the areas of behaviour management and special needs and we can also draw upon external expertise to inform our options.

Overall, it is important that all parties involved work closely together. Each case will be different, as will the resolution. Parents should feel free to arrange time to talk with their child's Key Person or the Nursery Manager/Deputy Manager should they have any questions.