

Information Sheet: Preschool Biting



Background:

Why do children Bite?

For parents and teachers, biting can be a challenging and emotional issue. While biting is acknowledged to be a phase of normal development for many young children, it is difficult to reconcile the normalcy of an act which carries not only the stigma of being a social taboo, but concerns for psychological security and possibilities of physical injury. Toddlers who are first starting out at school, might not know how to approach their peers in acceptable ways. They often express their interest in others by biting, pulling hair, pushing, etc.

In preschool, we anticipate that some children will experiment with biting. We employ a multitude of strategies and actions to reduce the number of incidents and reinforce healthy alternatives.

Expectations:

The ratio in our two youngest preschool classes (Red & Blue groups), is 2 teachers:11 students. This 1:5.5 ratio is well above the required standard, which allows us to offer closer interactions with the students. Despite this ratio, it is important to have reasonable expectations of preschool staff. While extra attention is paid to students who bite in order to redirect them, it is unfeasible to have complete prevention in a classroom setting where 1-1 supervision does not exist.

Communication between school and home is vital in changing behavior. Parents are expected to work with their children at home to support the work being done at school. We would like to take this opportunity to stress that in any biting situation, it is important for the parent or caregiver to address the issue in a loving and supportive manner. It is important that both the child who bit and the child who was bitten receive positive intervention which promotes and preserves positive self-concept while addressing each one's individual needs for love, limits and reassurance.

While biting may be a challenge in the early years of preschool, we do expect the behavior to change with positive school interventions and maturation of the student.

Common Strategies in Biting Instances:

Children need lots of social experiences in order to learn how to interact with others. AGM teachers use strategies like taking the child's hand as they reach out to others roughly and say, "touch gently, that makes her feel so happy." We acknowledge a child's interest in other children by saying, "I know you like Maral, but I can't let you chew on her. You can give her a toy." We provide enough material so children can play beside each other (parallel play) with age appropriate materials and equipment. We notice positive peer interactions such as one child hugging another, giving a toy to another, smiling to another.

Modeling loving, nurturing, sharing, polite, positive behavior for students to imitate is also an important strategy. We develop a repertoire of behaviors for handling children's negative behavior. This repertoire can

include: redirecting to a positive activity, giving "I" messages such as "I feel very upset when you hit Johnny because it really hurts him," actively listening to a child who is angry by saying "You are feeling very angry at Johnny. He took your toy and that made you feel angry," or using a brief *time-out period* (this phrase not used in front of children), for the biting child.

Helping the young child to also develop a repertoire of behaviors for handling frustrations and angry feelings is another important approach. Helping the student learn to say, "NO!" to another child who grabs a toy. Teach the child to say, "I feel angry" (sad, happy, etc.) to adults and peers. This is not "smarting off" to adults, it is a healthy sharing of feelings.

From the very first biting instance, the teacher shows strong disapproval of the behavior through words and manner. Strategies such as peer empathy are implemented by having the biter place ice on the child they bit while the teacher helps them empathize with the pain their friend is feeling. (simply asking the child to say sorry is not sufficient).

Parents of the student who bit and who got bit are notified from the very first instance.

If biting persists, the school team might decide to keep the child from attending school for a day or two, in order to create distance, give the staff time to evaluate the situation and ensure that the parent is spending enough time with the child to work on their behavior.

The school also reserves the right to ask parents to secure outside intervention if deemed necessary. AGM does not guarantee the ability to shadow a student, therefore it is the parent's responsibility to secure a shadow if biting occurs excessively.

The environment for the young child may need to be changed before biting will be decreased. The school may change a child's classroom if we feel a different environment will help alleviate the behavior.

Goal

The ultimate goal of our school is to support each and every child in their individual developmental and academic needs. We are committed to each student and will employ all measures available to us to help our children reach their greatest potential. We depend on a loving and supportive community of parents and caregivers to partner with us to help attain this goal.

We share with you a mutual goal of loving and guiding children toward a healthy and wonderful future.

The combination of maturation, proactive intervention and redirection typically reduces the incidents of biting in a group environment or at home.