



**Little Swans Day Nursery**  
**Biting in the Toddler Years Policy**  
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**Play Right – Don't Bite!**

Children who bite others hurt their peers and upset parents, carers and teachers. Other children may avoid the biters; adults may isolate them. So why do children bite and how can we change their behaviour?

- Biting is very common in groups of young children, for all types of reasons. But whatever the reason for biting most parents find it shocking and disturbing, and they want it to stop QUICKLY!
- Understanding why a young child bites is the first step in preventing biting as well as teaching the child alternatives to biting.

At Little Swans once it has been identified that a child is biting, we observe the child to try and find the reason, so that we may deal with it swiftly and successfully. In the first instance we carry out observations in order to find a pattern. Once that pattern has been established we deal with biters in the following way.

**Most common reasons and solutions for biting**

- **The Experimental Biter:** It is not uncommon for an infant or toddler to explore their world, including people, by biting. Infants and toddlers place many items in their mouths to learn more about them. At Little Swans we teach the child that some things can be bitten, like toys and food, and some things cannot be bitten, like people and animals. Another example of the experimental biter is the toddler who wants to learn about cause and effect. This child is wondering “what will happen when I bite my friend or mommy?” We provide this child with many other opportunities to learn about cause and effect, with toys and activities.
- **The Teething Biter:** Infants and toddlers experience a lot of discomfort when they are teething. A natural response it to apply pressure to their gums by biting on things. It is not unusual for a teething child to bear down on a person’s shoulder or breast to relieve some of their teething pain. If we have a teething biter at the nursery we ask parents to provide appropriate item for the child to teeth on; like teething biscuits or teething rings.
- **The Social Biter:** Many times an infant or toddler bites when they are trying to interact with another child. These young children have not yet developed the social skills to indicate “Hi, I want to play with you” So sometimes they approach a friend with a bite to say hello. At nursery we watch children very closely to assist them in positive interactions with their friends.
- **The Frustrated Biter:** Young children are often confronted with situations that are frustrating, like when a friend takes their toy or when daddy is unable to respond to their needs as quickly as they would like. These toddlers lack the social and emotional skills to cope with their feelings in an acceptable way. They also lack the language skills to communicate their feelings. At these times, it is not unusual for a toddler to attempt to deal with the frustration by biting whoever is nearby. At the setting we observe the child who is struggling with frustration and are ready to intervene. It is also important that we

provide words for the child to help them learn how to express their feelings, like “that’s mine!” or “No, don’t push me!” While teaching the child that is biting to express themselves in a different way too: When things have calmed down, we try to help the child find a less painful way to express their feelings.

This works well with children who are biting to try to show their affection. “If your child’s expressing love, teach them to hug rather than bite whenever they feel strong emotions.” Likewise, if your child bites out of defence, show them how to tell somebody they don’t want him or her too close – to make the “stop” sign (a hand held up) – or even gently to push the other child’s shoulder which won’t hurt but gives a clear message. Or teach them to come and find you instead if they’re angry.

### **Reduce the effectiveness:**

When children bite to gain attention, dealing with it is trickier. After the first big talking to, we don’t try to continue to reason or explain, but give a firm “no”. “Putting our body between victim and biter and turning our back on the biter.

- **The Threatened Biter:** When some children feel a sense of danger they respond by biting as a self-defence. For some children biting is a way to try to gain a sense of control over their lives, especially when they are feeling overwhelmed by their environment or events in their lives? At Swans we provide the toddler with nurturing support, to help them understand that he and their possessions are safe.
- **The Imitative Biter:** Imitation is one of the many ways young children learn. So it is not unusual for a child to observe a friend bite, then try it out for herself. We offer the child many examples of loving, kind behaviour.
- **The Attention Seeking Biter:** Children love attention, especially from adults. When parents or staff gives lots of attention for negative behaviour, such as biting, children learn that biting is a good way to get attention. At the nursery we provide lots of positive attention for young children each day. We also minimize the negative attention to behaviours such as biting.
- **The Power Biter:** Toddlers have a strong need for independence and control. Very often the response children get from biting helps to satisfy this need. We provide many opportunities for the toddler to make simple choices throughout the day. This will help the toddler feel the sensed of control they need. It is also important for us to reinforce all the toddlers’ attempts at positive social behaviour each day.

As with almost all potentially harmful situations involving children, prevention is the key. Parents, along with staff at the nursery must be active observers of children to prevent biting in those times when close supervision doesn’t work. The adult must intervene as quickly and as calmly as possible.

### **When intervening before the Potential Bite has occurred ...**

- At nursery we may talk for the child by offering words like “I see that you wanted that toy!”
- We demonstrate patience and understanding for the frustration the child is experiencing. And offer solutions like “we have another red truck over here. Let’s go get it”
- We demonstrate alternative ways of interacting and say something like “She likes it when you rub her arm”. And we try to stay focused on the positive behaviour we want to see, without reminding the child of the negative behaviour

### **When a Child Bites at Nursery ...**

- We comfort the child who has bitten
- Cleanse the wound with a cold compress
- Provide comfort for the wounded child by saying something like “That really hurt! You don’t like it when your friend bites your arm!”

- We calmly approach the child who bit. Many times these children feel overwhelmed and afraid after they bite. They need comfort too, however not in the form of physical contact comfort
- Therefore we comfort the child who has bit by saying something like “you seem sad that your friends arm is hurt from the bite?”
- We help the child who bit to understand the hurt their friend is feeling by offering to let her talk with her friend. Say something like “Would you like to see Sally now? You can tell her that you hope that she feels better soon”. Older toddlers can learn a lot from being allowed to comfort their friend after a bite has occurred. The toddler who bit may want to see the injury. That’s ok if the injured child wants to show it. But we do not force either child to have this interaction, unless both are willing.
- We reinforce the rule that we don’t hurt people, and help both children to understand that our job is to keep everyone safe. We use language such as “I know you are angry, but I can’t let you bite people”.
- When the environment is calm again, we remind the child who has been bit what they can do to assert themselves, like say “No! That’s mine!” Or to “Back away!!” Or if they are pre-verbal, we teach them to ‘growl like a tiger’ to express themselves. The goal is to teach assertiveness and communication skills to both the child who bites and the child who gets bitten...

At Home Never Hit or Bite a Child who has bitten as that will Teach the Child that Violence is acceptable. Young children need lots of practice to learn the fine art of interacting with their friends in a positive way. They need positive guidance and support from parents. When children gain maturity and experience, and become pre-schoolers(3+ years old), they will likely have developed more appropriate ways of interacting.

### **Action to Prevent Future Biting**

- At the nursery we avoid labelling children as biters. We watch for positive behaviour and reward it with our attention. “Tyler may I join you for a few minutes? It’s fun to see what you are building”.
- We make sure the child’s routine allows for adequate rest, food and drink
- Avoid overcrowding toddlers and include structured activities as well as unstructured Activities
- We help a child deal with stress. We work together with parents to reassure a child whose family is experiencing a major change. If the child has not developed language skills we encourage them to express feelings in other ways, through exploratory means or physical activity

### **Communicating with Parents**

- At the nursery we chart incidents of biting and inform the parents of each of the children involved, though not by name as confidentiality should be maintained so the identity of one child involved is not revealed to parents of another
- We let parents know what steps we are taking to ensure the safety of all of the children
- We work with parents of the child who bites to provide consistent responses to biting at home or at the nursery
- We make sure all parents are aware of policies we have in place relating to biting or other aggressive behaviour

### **Resources**

For resources relating to biting see the following websites:

- NDNA ‘A Parent’s Guide to Promoting Positive Behaviour Teaching then to Express Themselves’
- What to do when Toddlers Bite: [www.handinhandparenting.org](http://www.handinhandparenting.org)
- Top Tips on Stopping your Child Biting: Parenting Skills: [www.supernanny.co.uk](http://www.supernanny.co.uk)