



BITING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

While biting is a common part of the first years of life, it can present significant issues. It is important to understand the reasons why babies and toddlers bite, how to react when biting occurs, and how to communicate with caregivers* when biting happens.

Babies and toddlers bite for various reasons. Babies and toddlers explore their environment orally, and they often put items in their mouths as part of exploration. During these first years, children are teething and may bite to relieve the pain they feel as their teeth appear. Teething is a unique period of development that brings new sensations and draws their attention to their mouth even more. This developmental stage is also one of limited language. When a toddler becomes frustrated, excited, or tired, they may bite to communicate these feelings. These sensations of teething, learning language, and oral sensorial exploration are not always comprehensible to adults.

In our classrooms, the staff constantly observes the children. They identify cues, look for patterns, and notice situations that may lead to biting incidents so they are able to prevent them from happening. Supervision is the key to reducing ongoing problems with biting.

When one child bites another child, the staff typically handles the situation by separating the two children, caring for the needs of both children, and assessing the behavior of the child who did the biting. The child who bit is redirected with an alternative activity such as biting on a cold cloth if they are teething, supplied with adequate space and activities to reduce frustration and competition, and encouraged to use words to express their needs and feelings and to not bite.

After a biting incident, the guide communicates with the caregivers of both children about what measures are being taken to prevent further biting incidents. The guide may discuss with the caregivers of the child who bit about their child's current state and how they handle frustration, excitement, or other emotions at home. They talk about possible patterns or situations where their child may be more likely to react by biting.

In summary, biting is typically a brief stage while a baby or toddler learns and improves their ability to communicate. Classroom staff are prepared with a plan for biting incidents. The plan includes steps to take once a child has been bitten, how to prevent future biting incidents, and communication with the caregiver. The goal is to ease the hurt everyone feels when a child is bitten.

**Caregivers is a term we are using to represent parents, legal guardians, relatives, nannies, babysitters, teachers, and classroom staff – anyone who cares for a child's wellbeing.*