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Biting policy

Biting can be fairly common among young children and can be a concern for staff and parents. Biting can often be painful and frightening for the child who has been bitten. It can also be frightening for the child who bites, because it upsets the child and they don't always understand what they are doing wrong. In fact many biters are otherwise gentle and very sociable. Biting happens for different reasons with different children and under different circumstances.

Examples why children bite:

Exploration

Babies and toddlers learn by touching, smelling, hearing and tasting. If you give a baby a toy, one of the first things they will do is put it in their mouth. Tasting or mouthing objects is something that all children do. Young children do not always understand the difference between gnawing on a toy and biting a person.

Teething

Children begin teething around the ages of four and seven months. Swelling gums can be tender and can cause a great deal of discomfort. Babies sometimes find relief from this discomfort by chewing on something and sometimes the object they chew is a person. Children of this age do not understand the difference between chewing on a person or a toy.

Cause and effect

Around the age of 12 months, babies become interested in finding out what happens when they do something. When they bang a spoon on the table, they discover that it makes a loud sound. When they drop a toy from their cot, they discover that it falls. They may also discover that when they bite someone, they get a reaction.

Attention

Older toddlers may sometimes bite to get attention. When children are in situations where they feel they are not receiving enough attention they often find a way to make others take notice. Being ignored is not fun and biting is a quick way to become the centre of attention, even if it is negative attention.

Imitation

Older toddlers love to imitate others. Watching others and trying to do what they do is a great way to learn things. Some children see others bite and decide to try it out themselves.

Independence

Toddlers are trying so hard to be independent; "mine" and "me do it" are favourite words. Learning to do this independently, making choices and needing control over a situation are part of a growing up and biting is a powerful way to control others. If a child wants a toy or a playmate to leave you alone or move out of the way, it is a quick way to get what you want.

Frustration

Young children experience a lot of frustration and growing up is a struggle. Drinking from a cup is great, but sucking from a bottle is wonderful. Sometimes it would be nice to remain a baby. Toddlers do not always have control over their bodies and cannot always express themselves. A loving pat sometimes turns into a push and they sometimes experience difficulty in asking for things or for help. They have not yet learned how to interact with others. At times, when they are unable to find the words to express their feelings, they resort to hitting, pushing or biting.

Stress

A child's world can be stressful. A lack of interesting things to do or not enough interaction with adults is a stressful situation for children. Children also experience traumatic events in their lives, such as bereavement, moving to a new home or even starting a new nursery. Biting is one way to express feelings and relieve tension. Young children are not always able to fully understand what they are feeling so they just act up.

At Little Cherubs we take biting very seriously, hurtful behaviour is momentary, spontaneous and often without cognisance of the feelings of the person they have hurt. We recognise that young children behave in hurtful ways towards others because they have not developed the means to manage the feeling that sometimes overwhelm them. Staff will help to manage these feelings.

We offer support to the child that has bitten and to the child that has been bitten; calming them and allowing them to respond and help manage their feelings appropriately. Pre-verbal children are calmed through holding and cuddling; they are given an explanation and talk to them about the incident at a level that is suited to their understanding and explained that biting is not ok and that it hurts, and will be given less attention for their negative behaviour. We try and encourage the child to say sorry and redirect them the child into play. We reinforce appropriate behaviour and tell the child how to respond instead of biting. An incident form will then be filled out in full with the child's details and a statement of what happened and was the child provoked? etc. This form is then signed by the witness, manager and the parents upon collection.

For the child that was bitten we offer them support; calming them through holding and cuddling giving them the tender loving care they need and applying any first aid which may be needed. Once the child is happy they return to play and an accident form is filled in with the child's details, the details of what happened and the nature of the injury. This is then signed by the first aider, a witness of the incident, manager and parent.

If biting continues the child's key person, behaviour officer and manager will meet and discuss a strategy plan. This will also be discussed with the parents in a meeting where parents will be informed of the concerns and the procedures that we will be put in place to be followed and to help deal with the situation. They will be informed that their child will be shadowed by their child's key person to keep a close eye on the situation and why the situations may be arising. This will be recorded down on a form with all the details of what happened and if the child was provoked or not, the time of day etc. A copy will then be given to the parent at the end of each day and a copy kept in the child's file in the office. As a result to the shadowing we may see a pattern forming and find out that the child may of been biting for many of reasons such as an exploration or teething so we may want to provide your child with a teething ring, or if the child seems to bite when they are tired or

hungry, we may want to look at the daily routine to make sure they are getting enough food and sleep. It is important that even when you feel nothing is working to continue with your plan of action! And is important to be consistent and show the child that we are adults and they need to be behaving well. Reactions from parents can be completely out of proportion, it can be difficult to remain calm but it is important to remember that many children do bite.

It is a serious problem because it hurts and it can lead to children being excluded from nurseries if things don't improve after behaviour management steps have been put in place and been followed we may exclude the child if we feel it's the best course of action for all concerned. This exclusion may be a temporary one whilst a procedure is developed to assist the staff in future controlling of situations where biting cannot be dissuaded. However in more serious cases, or where additional measures have been unsuccessful, the nursery may regretfully make the exclusion a permanent one for the safety of staff and children. This decision will only be taken in consultation with the director.