

## **Policy on Biting**

### **The Privette School**

Many children go through a biting phase, which may last up to several weeks. Biting causes more upset feelings than any other behavior in childcare programs. Because it seems so primitive, we tend to react differently to biting than we do to hitting, grabbing or other aggressive acts. This biting policy was created to give parents insight into why children bite and the actions that will be taken when a child is bitten as well as actions that will be taken to prevent biting.

#### **Why children bite**

Most biting occurs between the ages of 13 and 30 months and should stop around age three. Children bite for many reasons, including

- Toddlers are oral beings and still put everything into their mouths. This may include another child's finger.
- Toddlers do not have the cognitive ability to discriminate between animate and inanimate objects. A toddler may not be able to distinguish between a soft, plump teething ring and a soft, plump arm.
- Toddlers often bite because they are frustrated, tired or hungry. They do not have the vocabulary to say, "I'm hungry," "I'm tired," "I want that toy." Biting is often the basic response.
- Toddlers bite when there are too many children in close proximity. If another child is too close, too rough or too intimidating, a toddler will often bite to move them out of the way.
- Some toddlers will bite for the attention they receive from caregivers. Even if it is negative, caregivers often give a great deal of attention to biters. Children in need of attention will bite to get negative attention, which is better than no attention at all.
- Toddlers tend to be territorial in their behavior. They need a certain amount of space around them and their toys and usually do not want other children intruding on what they are playing with or doing. When another child comes too close, they may bite that child to remove them from their "space" or to keep them from taking their toys.
- Toddlers have very limited, if any, social skills. For this reason, they cannot talk out their problems with other children. As a result, they often act first because they have not learned to discuss their problems or feelings. Biting happens as an immediate reaction because they have not learned self-control or social skills.
- Many toddlers are teething and biting helps alleviate the pressure resulting from new teeth breaking through the gums.
- Some children bite often and some not at all. In addition, some children seem to be victims more than others.

*(From the Mississippi Forum on Children and Families, Inc.)*

#### **Preventative steps**

The Privette School has gone to great lengths to create an environment that will serve to decrease incidents of biting. Some of these steps include

- the use of small groups during play,
- appropriate toys on which to bite, including attaching teethers safely to the clothing of those children known to bite,
- teaching children appropriate words with which to express themselves,
- shadowing children known to bite, and

- Parent education that includes this policy, parent meetings about developmental issues, including biting, and other literature.

Despite these best efforts, whenever young children are grouped together it is inevitable that biting will occasionally occur. If a child is having a problem with biting the staff will work with the parents to try to resolve the problem together. The parent of the biter may be concerned that the child will be expelled from the day-care center and may also be concerned about what the parent of the child who was bitten may be thinking or feeling. The Privette School caregivers will address the problem of biting when it occurs. Each biting incident will take into account the age of the child and the suspected reason for the biting.

Though it is normal for infants and toddlers to mouth people and toys, and for many two-year olds to try biting, most do not continue after the age of three. If the behavior becomes chronic or out of control, or continues past the age of three, parents will be asked to a conference with caregivers and the director to discuss appropriate ways to deal with the problem. Should the problem continue and begin to cause stress among the caregivers and parents and fear among the children, the director reserves the right to remove the child from the center for one - three months, until the behavior has been resolved.

### **When a child is bitten**

First and foremost, when a child is bitten, caregivers will

- attend immediately to the injured child providing comfort and care
- have the child who did the biting sit to the side where someone can watch him/her;
- Provide appropriate treatment (e.g. cleaning the area with soap and water, applying ice, antibiotic ointment, or a band-aid as needed) When biting behavior persists, a close eye will be kept on the biting child. If possible, a caregiver will remain close to the child to prevent incidents.
- when the bitten child is calm and the bite attended to, the caregiver will allow the biting child to gently stroke the victim so that both children learn the appropriate social behavior
- when the bite breaks the skin, an accident report will be completed by the caregiver and filed
- verbally inform the parent of the child who was bitten and the parent of the biter
- caregivers will "shadow" the biting child

### **Actions that will NOT be taken**

Although some parents insist that a child who is biting be physically punished or removed from the school, children will never be physically hurt (bitten back) as a form of punishment for biting. Teachers will not withdraw food, love or keep them in isolation. Nothing will be placed in the biting child's mouth in order to prevent future biting. *For confidentiality reasons and under no certain circumstances will teachers or the director reveal the identity of the biting child.*

It is important to keep in mind that biting is a developmental issue that does pass. Parent patience, understanding and support is very helpful to The Privette School caregivers

Please sign below to confirm that you have read and understand this biting policy.

Parent Signature \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date