

Biting Policy

As in any business it is necessary occasionally to revise existing policy. The time is here to revise our policy for dealing with the issue of biting. We have spoken to several child care professionals, including our state and county licensing specialists. In general, any center that accepts children under thirty months of age and has a capacity for more than forty children will have a number of problems with biting. We have decided upon the following written policy.

Rosslyn Children's Center reserves the right to assess each case of problem biting on an individual basis and to work with the parents to remedy it. We will follow the procedure outlined below to eliminate the behavior problem.

The initial procedure to be followed as soon as it appears that a child is biting excessively without apparent provocation will be:

- To schedule a meeting with the Director, child's teacher and the parents to develop a plan to resolve the situation;
- To continue meetings with the director, teacher and parents on a weekly basis to track improvement or note any other changes for a period of two weeks;
- To maintain a file of documentation on the situation and pertinent meetings (the parents will be given a copy of this file).

If, after pursuing this initial procedure the problem persists, we shall initiate a second procedure:

- When the child continues excessive biting with no obvious provocation, we shall notify the parents in writing that we need to meet with them to discuss the problem, request that they consult a behavioral specialist to do an observation and decide upon a joint course of action which will be in the best interest of both the child doing the biting and the other children in the program.

If, after pursuing this second procedure the problem still persists for a period of two weeks, we shall give the parents two weeks notice to find another childcare arrangement which will be more appropriate to the child and family's needs.

Aggressive Behavior in Non-Verbal Children

Most toddlers and many early two year olds are not highly verbal and cannot articulate their feelings of anger, frustration, fear or fatigue. Therefore, they often resort to demonstrating emotions with physical actions toward others which, though age-appropriate, are **not** socially acceptable. One of the responsibilities of parents and care-givers is to assist children as they grow older in learning to replace their physical reactions with socially and culturally appropriate verbal or behavioral responses.

One of the universal forms of aggressive behavior used by non-verbal children to express emotions is biting. Bite is a word that brings many fears and worries to mind. Personality traits, behavior reinforcement, conditions of environment and simple chance all play roles in developing this aggressive type of behavior as a method of self-expression. As teachers, care-givers and parents, we try to catch this split second deed before it happens. Unfortunately, that is not always possible. The task of parents and care-givers is to understand the reason for biting behavior and be prepared to deal with it effectively. As a large center, meeting the needs of 130+ children and their families, we have the additional obligation of ensuring that all of our children receive quality care in a loving, safe and enriching environment.

If your child bites, it means that he or she has found this to be an effective and satisfying coping response. Physical responses are often provoked by such acts on the part of another child as grabbing at a toy or pushing. In other circumstances the biting appears to be unprovoked by any direct or immediate action on the part of another child. In these circumstances parents and care-givers need to work together to determine if there is some occurrence in the home routine which could be causing emotional outbursts in the childcare environment.

For example, the arrival of a new baby at home may cause fears and insecurities in a toddler which he expresses by aggressively biting other children. If a child is not getting enough sleep at night or does not have adequate time to get internally organized in the morning, he or she may be "out of sorts" upon an early morning arrival at a center. This can cause increased aggressive behavior.

There is no magic cure. What we need to do as teachers and parents is to grow through this stage in the child's development with him or her. We need to encourage language development and simple verbal skills, to demonstrate by our own actions alternative methods of dealing with frustration, to create an environment that is as free of potential conflicts as possible and to deal with a biting incident using a consistent and firmly stated reminder that the behavior is not acceptable.

We have created a more stress-free group environment here at our Center by instituting routine, reducing children's choices of toys or activities to a manageable level while still providing adequate stimulation for each child and by keeping group times to small numbers of children.

No one wants their child to bite or be bitten. In most cases, understanding their frustration, eliminating potential stress in their environments, encouraging verbal capabilities will reduce the child's distress. Occasionally, we in the child care profession encounter a situation in which the standard practices do not seem to be efficacious.

This is not a negative judgment of the child(ren) involved. Rather, it is an indicator that a group setting may not be appropriate for the children(ren) at that age. No group setting can provide a one-to-one level of supervision for more than several days. Some children are ready for socialization sooner than others; some learn acceptable externalization techniques at an earlier age.