

When Children Bite

Children communicate verbally and physically. Toddlers may not have gained the verbal skills necessary to properly communicate their needs and wants, or can't access their higher brain functions, which include language, when they are very upset. As a result, young children may enter a biting phase in order to fulfill a need or as a coping mechanism. This is normal behavior for young children. As caregivers, it is important to observe and see what the underlying cause of the biting is and to help the child exit the biting phase as quickly as they entered.

If a child is biting, it is imperative not to label that child a "biter." We are all more than a single trait or action, and labels, at this age especially, can be very damaging. The child who is biting has a reason for biting and it is up to us to figure out the reason by observing the child and discovering:

- Is there a pattern to the biting?
- What time of day is the biting happening?
- Is the child targeting a specific child?
- What is happening within the classroom/social group when the child bites another child?

We can better identify a solution for the child who is doing the biting after determining the answers to these questions

At Odyssey, we encourage children to use physical communication skills such as hand motions if they have not gained the skills to communicate verbally. For example, we may raise our hands in front of our body indicating "no thank you," or cover our work with our hands to indicate "my work." Encouraging peaceful physical communication, we believe, alleviates the frustration of not being able to communicate, which can then lead to aggressive physical communication. At the same time, we model using words and short phrases as well.

Children within the same social group as a child who has entered a biting stage may find themselves bitten once or twice. Because the children's safety is of the utmost

importance, we do our best to observe children closely. It is important, as the parent of a child who's been bitten, to understand the following steps are taken in order to help:

- Your child's teacher will watch the child who is biting when they are interacting with other children in order to try to answer the aforementioned questions.
- If needed, separate the child who is biting into a small group work or outdoor play environment in order to allow for closer observation and less stimulation,
- Redirect the child who is biting in order to keep the child focused on an activity rather than peers.
- Read stories about biting.
- Encourage the child who bit to help care for the child they have bitten in order to understand the tangible consequences.
- Instead of isolating the child, we encourage the child to interact in a smaller group setting that is directly supervised.

These are some solutions that you child's teacher may use in order to keep all children safe.

Here is a link to a useful site for more information regarding children who bite.

<https://www.naeyc.org/our-work/families/understanding-and-responding-children-who-bite>