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Managing Biting in Young Children: A Guide for Educators and Parents

Biting is a common behaviour observed in young children, particularly in childcare settings. It can be a response to frustration, sensory needs, or difficulty with communication. While it is often a typical developmental phase, it is important to address it appropriately to support the child's growth and maintain a safe environment. Here are practical tips to help manage biting behaviour from an Occupational Therapy (OT) perspective.

Why Do Children Bite?

Biting can occur for several reasons, including:

- **Exploring Boundaries:** Children might bite as they're learning about rules and limits.
- **Sensory Needs:** Some children bite because they need to chew or bite for sensory input.
- **Connection Seeking:** Biting might happen if children realise it gets a reaction from others.
- **Difficulty Regulating Emotions:** Biting can also be a sign that a child is struggling to manage feelings like excitement, anger, or anxiety.
- **Teething Discomfort:** Teething can make children want to bite for relief.

How Can Educators and Parents Manage Biting?

1. Stay Calm and Consistent

- If a child bites, try to stay calm. Your response will help the child understand the behaviour.
- Use simple language like, "We don't bite. Biting hurts."
- Be consistent in your response so the child knows what to expect each time.

2. Provide Alternatives

- Encourage children to use words, signs, or pictures to communicate their needs.
- Teach children how to express frustration or anger with words or by using actions like squeezing a toy/ stress ball.
- **Offer sensory tools** like chewy toys, crunchy snacks, or a chewy necklace if sensory needs are the cause of the biting.
- **Redirect the child to another activity** or a calming task, like drawing or using a sensory toy.

3. Identify Triggers

- Watch for patterns to see if biting happens in specific situations, like during transitions, when waiting for attention, or while playing.



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- **Provide calm-down spaces** for children who feel overwhelmed or overstimulated.
- 4. **Provide Emotional Support**
 - **Attend to the Injured Child:** Comfort and care for them first.
 - **Address the Biter:** Acknowledge feelings and offer alternatives ("I see you're upset. Let's find another way to express that.").
 - Help children recognise and name their emotions, like "happy," "angry," "sad," or "scared."
 - Teach children how to use their words instead of biting when they're feeling upset.
 - Encourage calming techniques such as deep breathing or holding a comfort item.

When to Seek Additional Support

While biting is often a normal behaviour, we're here to help if it becomes more frequent or intense. If biting is happening frequently or in multiple places (like at home and at childcare), it might be time to **reach out to an OT!** We can assess the child's needs and give you individualised support to help them thrive!