



Dubuque Montessori School Biting Policy

Perspective on Biting

Biting is a very common behavior among children birth to three years of age. Biting is a form of communication and is almost always a response to the child's needs not being met or coping with a challenge or stressor. At Dubuque Montessori School we believe by understanding the developmental stages of the children in our care and their individual needs, we can proactively prevent many biting behaviors by the environment which we create for the children.

We understand that children biting other children, is one of the most common and most difficult behaviors to deal with in group child care settings. It can occur without warning, can be difficult to defend against, and provokes strong emotional responses in the biter, the victim, the families, and the caregivers involved.

For many toddlers, the biting stage is just a passing problem. Toddlers try it out as a way to get what they want from another toddler. They are in the process of learning what is socially acceptable and what is not. They discover that biting is a sure-fire way to cause the other child to drop what they are holding so the biter can pick it up. However, they experience the disapproval of the adults nearby and eventually learn other ways of gaining possession of objects or expressing difficult feelings.

For other children, biting is a persistent and chronic problem. They may bite for a variety of reasons: teething, frustration, boredom, inadequate language skills, stress or change in the environment, feeling threatened, or to feel a sense of power.

In order to alleviate some of triggers for biting, DMS has many practices in place that are known to help prevent incidences of biting in small children.

- Quality relationships: Staff develops nurturing relationships with the children and gets to know each child individually. Staff is given many opportunities for professional development to help he/she learn ways to build quality relationships with the children.
- Environmental influences on child's behaviors: Children are given opportunities to work in both small and large groups; there is a variety of work and children are taught how to share "work;" the environment in a Montessori classroom is often quiet and productive which is very soothing to children; and staff are very aware of and willing to help a child that is feeling overwhelmed.
- Targeted social-emotional supports: Children have a daily routine that they follow which consists of circle time, time to pursue own work, and snack time. Children learn early how to navigate classroom transitions in a way that helps them build confidence and alleviate stress. Staff talks about emotions/feelings through books and other work and teaches strategies such as yoga to help children learn to calm themselves.

No matter what the cause, it is important to be aware of the potential problem before it happens. Therefore, Dubuque Montessori School, after consulting child care experts and manuals, has developed the following plan of action to be used if and when biting occurs in our school

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Response to Biting - Action Plan

Before biting occurs:

1. Upon initial enrollment or at the start of each school year, the Director will give each family a handout which addresses the issue of biting.
2. Distribute the written policy When a Child is Bitten to all families upon enrollment.
3. Create an environment which meets the developmental needs of the children. Monitor and supervise all children while working and/or playing. Redirect in situations where a potential biting incident may occur. Maintain an environment that elicits calm, thoughtful behavior.

When a child is bitten:

For the biter:

1. The biter is immediately removed with no emotion, using words such as “biting is not okay – it hurts.” We will avoid any immediate response that reinforces the biting or calls attention to the biter. Caring attention will be focused on the child who was bitten.
2. The biter will not be allowed to return to work/play and will be talked to on a level which he/she can understand. “I can see that you want that truck, but I can’t let you hurt him. We don’t put our teeth on people.”
3. The child will be redirected to other work/play.
4. Staff will complete a DMS incident report* and notify the family of the biter when the child is picked up for the day.

For the victim:

1. Staff will separate the child who was bitten from the biter.
2. Special attention will be given to comfort the child.
3. Staff will administer appropriate first aid as follows:
 1. Assess the wound and if it is bleeding, apply pressure directly to the wound, using a clean, dry cloth, until the bleeding stops.
 2. Clean the bite wound with a mild soap and warm running water for approximately 3 - 5 minutes.
 3. Rinse thoroughly, and pat dry with a clean, dry cloth.
 4. Cover the wound with a clean, dry dressing.
 5. Should the wound require immediate medical attention, appropriate action will be taken and parents will be notified immediately.
4. Staff will then complete a DMS incident report* to notify family of the victim that the child has been bitten.
5. Classroom staff will confer with the director to review the context of the biting incident, whether adequate supervision was present and whether the environment contributed to the biting incident. If changes in supervision and/or environment are warranted, then those changes will be implemented.

*DMS incident report is a confidential, standardized form that all staff uses to document incidents that happen at school such as first aid notification, child wellness reports, etc. in which pertinent information must be recorded for school records as well as a way to communicate with parents.

When biting continues:

1. Classroom staff will meet with the director on a routine basis for advise, support and strategy planning.
2. Staff will chart every occurrence, including attempted bites, and indicate location, time, participants, behaviors, staff present, and circumstances.
3. Staff will “shadow” children who indicate a tendency to bite, to:
 - Head off biting situations before they occur.
 - Teach non-biting responses to situations and reinforce appropriate behavior.
 - Adapt the program to better fit the individual child’s needs.
 - Teach responses to potential biting situations: “Stop” or “That hurts!”
4. Staff will work together as partners with the parents of both biting children and frequent victims to keep all informed and develop a joint strategy for change.
5. Teachers will hold a conference with the parents of the biting child to develop a written plan of action. Schedule follow-up meetings or telephone conversations as needed.
6. Teachers will consider early transition of a child “stuck” in a biting behavior pattern for a change of environment, if developmentally appropriate.
7. Prepare the parents of the biting child for the possibility that the child may have to be removed from the Center and help them to make contingency plans.
8. If it is deemed in the best interest of the child, center, and other children, terminate the child from Dubuque Montessori School for the duration of the biting stage. Written warning will be given to the families before this action will be taken.

Biting Confidentiality

In compliance with NAEYC confidentiality guidelines, DMS staff will maintain complete confidentiality of all children involved when notifying parents that their child has been bitten or bit another child.

