

## **Pathways Inc. Child Care Programs**

### **I PHILOSOPHY: ADDRESSING BITING BEHAVIOR**

Our program recognizes that biting is, unfortunately, not unexpected when toddlers are in group care. We are always upset when children are bitten in our program, and we recognize how upsetting it is for parents. While we feel that biting is never the right thing for toddlers to do, we know that they bite for a variety of reasons. Most of these reasons are not related to behavior problems. Our program, then, does not focus on punishment for biting, but on effective techniques that address the specific reason for the biting. When biting occurs our four main responses are:

1. to care for and help the child who was bitten,
2. to help the child who bit learn other behavior,
3. to work with the child who bit, and
4. to understand the reasons for the biting behavior so the biting will stop.

Our teachers express strong disapproval of biting. They work to keep children safe and help the child who bit learn different, more appropriate behavior. When there are episodes of on-going biting, we develop a plan of specific strategies, techniques and timelines to address it. We do not and will not use any response that harms a child or is known to be ineffective.

We give immediate attention and, if necessary, first aid to children who are bitten. We offer to put ice on the bite if the child is willing. We clean all bites with soap, water and betadine solution regardless if the skin gets broken.

If the bite breaks the skin, the child who bit is encouraged to brush his/her teeth and rinse their mouth.

When children bite, their parents are informed personally and privately the same day. When children are bitten, their parents are informed as soon as the child has receives first aid and comforting. Staff will contact parents each time a bite occurs, unless a parent states otherwise. They are given a copy of our accident form if they request one. When we experience on-going biting in a toddler room, we develop a written plan with specific strategies, techniques and timelines to work on the problem. This written plan is shared with all parents in the room (see sample).

Biting is always documented on our standard accident report form. It is completed and signed by a teacher and an administrator. It must also be signed by the parent. One copy is given to the parents, and the other copy is kept in the accident report book in the office.

We keep the name of the child who bit confidential. This is to avoid labeling and to give our teachers the opportunity to use their time and energy to work on stopping the biting.

We have staff training on dealing with biting as part of the orientation process, annually and specific to classroom needs on an as needed basis. In addition, we have current resources on

biting available for staff and parents. We encourage parents to bring their concerns and frustrations directly to the teachers.

In this regard, parents and families can expect that:

- We will put children's safety first and provide appropriate first aid as well as comfort and advice to any child who is bitten.
- We will provide appropriate programming for toddlers to help prevent biting.
- We will have current information and resources on biting for you.
- We will have teachers with adequate knowledge and training to deal appropriately and effectively with biting.
- We will take your concerns seriously and treat them with understanding and respect.
- We will tell you what specific steps are being taken to address biting and explain the reasoning behind those steps.
- We will respond to your questions, concerns and suggestions – even when the response to some suggestions might be “no.”
- We will work to schedule conferences about biting with you and your child's teacher.
- Your child's identity will be kept confidential if he or she bites. This helps avoid labeling or confrontations what will slow the process of learning not to bite.

### **MEASURES THAT HELP PREVENT BITING**

We know that, despite our best efforts, we cannot guarantee that there won't be any biting in our toddler programs, But we also know that the way we set up the room environment, the daily schedule we use, the expectations we have for toddlers and our interactions with them play a role in biting incidents – and especially epidemics! When environments, schedules, expectations and interactions don't match toddler development, we can expect to struggle with biting. Not only is biting more likely to occur, but it is more difficult to respond effectively to it. Here are suggestions that help prevent biting:

#### **Environment**

- Have duplicates of new toys and popular toys to reduce frustration.
- Rotate some toys from time to time while keeping popular ones available to avoid overstimulation because there are too many toys available.
- Provide small, private spaces where children can go to be alone. You still need to be able to see them, but they need to feel that they are alone.
- Provide several soft areas in the room.
- Have safe materials visible and available at the children's level so they can use them without an adult having to get them down or get them out.
- Arrangement should include various activity centers to discourage toddlers from bunching up in one area.
- Keep interesting activity areas and materials available during the day.

## **Schedule**

- **Keep the daily schedule consistent so it is predictable for children.**
- **Talk about unavoidable changes in the schedule and be understanding of children's reaction to them.**
- **Have several times each day when children go outside.**
- **Keep waiting time to a minimum. Have an objective person observe and keep track of actual waiting time in minutes. Most teachers feel that waiting time in their program is very short, and are surprised when they learn the actual waiting time. To put waiting time into perspective, take the number of minutes toddlers must wait, put a zero at the end of it and reflect on how you would react to that waiting time in that situation. For example, if the actual waiting time between an activity and lunch is 7 minutes, consider how you would respond to a 70-minute wait in a similar situation. And remember, you would be expected to be still, be quiet and be good during those 70 minutes.**
- **The day is not rushed; adults take the time to go through the daily routine calmly and don't rush children through activities or routines.**

## **Activities and Materials**

- **Provide a wide variety of soothing materials and activities. Have scarves and dress-up clothes that are soft and silky and cleaned often. Sensory activities like painting and play dough are available every day. The sand and water table should be available to toddlers at least several times a week. If your program doesn't have a sand water table, you can use small, individual basins.**
- **Provide many cause and effect toys that toddlers can act upon to make them "do something."**
- **Understand and provide opportunities for toddlers to put objects in containers, carry them around and then dump them out. This is a favorite toddler activity and, if indulged, soon progresses to the point where you can begin to teach them about picking up.**
- **Structure activities to be mostly child-initiated responses to and exploration of the (appropriate) materials and experiences adults offer.**
- **Offer adult-initiated activities that are spontaneous, short and optional like songs, stories and fingerplays.**
- **Do not expect toddlers to have formal circle time or sit in whole-group activities.**

## **Interactions with Children**

- Show children what empathy looks like and sounds like; model it in your interactions with them.
- Respond positively to children.
- Help children identify and name their feelings.

Show and tell children how to use language to express feelings and state their needs and wants.

- Encourage children to comfort themselves by using transitional items like a stuffed animal brought from home or by sucking their thumb (if that is what they already do to comfort themselves).
- Comfort children with soothing voice tone and physical actions such as hugs, a thoughtful hand on a child's shoulder and back rubs.
- Help children fix mistakes.
- Give attention in a generous and genuine manner.

Along with all the other information we have given you about our toddler room, we want you to know about one behavior which is, unfortunately, not unexpected in toddler groups, but can be very emotionally charged. That behavior is biting. There are many reasons toddlers may bite. Sometimes the biting is related to teething. Sometimes toddlers bite to express feelings they can't express with words yet. We have seen children bite when they are frustrated, and we have seen them bite in excitement of a happy moment. No one can predict which children may bite, but we are ready to help toddlers who do bite learn other behavior. We are also ready to give treatment, sympathy and advice to children who are bitten. Here are the ways we work to prevent biting and how we respond to it when it does happen.

First, we try to program the day so frustration levels are kept to a minimum by providing a calm and cheerful atmosphere, stimulating and soothing age-appropriate activities and multiple of favorite toys. We also work to model acceptable and appropriate behaviors for the children.

Second, if a bite does occur, we help the child who was bitten. We reassure him or her and care for the bite. If the skin is not broken, we use a cold pack and wash the bite with soap and water. If the skin is broken, we follow medical advice and clean the bite with soap and water. If it is likely that the bite may get dirty, we will also cover it to keep it clean. If your child is bitten, we call you to let you know about the bite, unless otherwise instructed by you the parent/guardian. The teachers fill out an accident report, have it signed by our administrators, keep a copy and give one to you when you pick up your child. We also respond to the child who did the biting. We show the children strong disapproval of biting. Our specific response varies depending on the circumstances, but our basic message is that biting is the wrong thing to do. We also help the child who bit learn different, more appropriate behavior.

Third, the teachers and administration try to analyze the cause of consistent or pattern biting. We work to develop a plan to address the causes of the biting, and put all our energy into keeping children safe and helping children who are stuck in biting patterns. When we need to develop such a plan, we share the details with parents so they know specifically how we are addressing this problem.

Fourth, parents are notified if their child starts to bite. We ask parents to keep us informed if their child is biting at home. Children who bite in our program do not necessarily bite at home. But if your child is biting in both places, it is important for all of us to be consistent in dealing with it. Communication is very important in order to help your child stop biting.

We wish we could guarantee that there would never be any biting in our program, but we know there is no such guarantee. You can count on us to deal appropriately with biting so that it will end as quickly as possible. We will support your children whether they bite or are bitten. We want the best for all the children in our program. If you want more information on biting or have any questions or concerns, please let us know.