

## **Policy on managing a biting incident: HS 02**

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**Policy Number: HS 02**

**Policy prepared by: EH Policy reference group**

This policy should be read in conjunction with the EtonHouse Policy Statement, Guiding Children's Behaviour (CUR 07).

### **Background to the policy statement:**

*Infants and toddlers experience many of the same emotions as adults, but often do not have the language skills to share these (emotions in socially acceptable ways). Arthur, Beecher, Dockett, Farmer and Death (1996 p 63). As a consequence educators must learn to observe and 'read' the physical reactions of the young child to understand their expression of emotions and feelings.*

### **The aim/purpose of the policy statement:**

EtonHouse educators acknowledge that young children experience a full range of both positive and negative emotions. Fear, frustration, sadness, stress and anger are confusing emotions for a young child to understand and *educators must acknowledge that all children have a right to have their feelings accepted as real and important* Arthur et al. (1996 p 63). At EtonHouse, educators are encouraged to understand their role in supporting all children to develop appropriate ways of understanding and regulating their emotions.

### **Policy statement:**

**At EtonHouse schools and preschools, we believe that staff must demonstrate respect and valuing of all children in their care. All children and families have a right to be supported in their participation in school and centre activities. All children and their families have a right to privacy and confidentiality of personal information.**

### **Implementation practices and procedures:**

#### **Positive environments for reducing stress in young children:**

- Environments for all children (and in particular toddlers) must be planned with the developmental characteristics of this particular age group in mind. Group size should be kept small to ensure that young children who are not yet verbal do not experience extreme frustration and stress due to overcrowding. Stressful situations contribute to increased frustration levels and may lead to biting incidents.
- Adult child ratios must be high to ensure that all children receive appropriate individual attention and that the whole group is adequately supervised at all times. Grouping strategies must acknowledge the importance of small group interaction with children who are just learning to work beside a peer. Where a biting incident has occurred in a

classroom, an additional adult will be placed within the classroom to ensure additional adult child interaction/support is provided to all children.

- Consideration must be given to providing 'personal' space in the classroom i.e. spaces where children can go to be quiet and to remove themselves from a group situation (and still be well supervised by the adults). This may simply be a quiet corner of the room which serves as a vantage point for the child to observe (rather than to participate) in classroom activity.
- Learning experiences must be planned in response to the observed interests and developmental characteristics of young children in particular to avoid undue frustration in participating in tasks which are not relevant or meaningful to the young child. Again small groups respond best to the young child's developing social skills.
- There must be adequate and suitable equipment/resources in the classroom to avoid unnecessary competition between children.
- Changes to routine and to staff in direct contact with children should be kept to a minimum as a break in familiar pattern of the day causes undue stress to young children.

#### **Interactions with and between children:**

- Staff must respond with sensitivity to the child who has been bitten or hurt through physical aggression. This child requires immediate comfort and reassurance. Staff must acknowledge that as well as physical pain, the child who has been bitten also feels sad, confused and uncertain.
- In the case of broken skin/bleeding from the wound, first aid must be administered immediately to the child who has been bitten. (An ice pack is most commonly applied to a bite mark to reduce the pain to the area).
- Staff must also support the child who has bitten to understand the consequences of their behaviour/expression of emotion. This will involve verbal interaction '*biting hurts*'. The child can be shown the bruise/bite mark and requested to participate in helping to comfort the child e.g. fetching a tissue; helping to obtain a drink of water, and ice pack, or cold cloth for the wound.
- Staff must acknowledge and label the feeling. (*I can see that you are angry; I know you are feeling sad*). Children's feelings are real and must be understood by those working with them. Providing a label for the emotion helps the child who is developing language begin to understand that what they are experiencing physically has a name. As they begin to develop their language they will have the words to talk about their feelings rather than react non verbally (biting).

- As part of an ongoing plan of action, staff must support the child to find legitimate ways to express emotion and to reduce stress/frustration e.g. observing to identify experiences which calm the child to avoid an expression of extreme emotion.
- The child who has bitten is also likely to feel uncertain about his relationship with the educator(s) as well as with the children. Staff must respect the child's feelings of worth and provide opportunities which support the child to participate positively in small group situations. It is important that all children develop positive self esteem. Increasing the opportunities to engage with the adults in a positive e.g. assisting with routine tasks supports the child in building trusting relationships with the adults. Approximations towards positive behaviour must be acknowledged.
- The level of stress a child experiences could be caused by a variety of factors e.g. noise levels within the room, another child's behaviour, shortage of equipment. Staff must attempt to identify the reason or the 'trigger' for the child's behaviour so as to minimize stressful situations. Staff must record detailed observations of the child's interaction with peers, materials and adults to explore possible reasons for the child's frustration. Once the trigger situation(s) has been identified a plan of action must be developed and implemented by contact staff to minimize the conditions/events which cause stress to the child.
- To support the safety of the whole group, children should be supported to 'use their words', rather than physical aggression, or biting e.g. STOP; No hitting. 'Using their words' empowers children by providing them with a legitimate strategy to stop the aggressor. The phrase can be reinforced (or replaced with non verbal children) with a simple hand gesture (stop).
- Children must be helped to understand that personal belongings and items of special significance should be kept at home, so as to avoid disagreements over ownership. Similarly children will need to be supported that at times their friends may need personal space away from the group.
- Sharing is a difficult concept for young children to understand, as is waiting their turn. Staff must support young children to understand how to take turns and to realize that equipment will be available again on following days. There must be sufficient equipment for the group size so as not to cause undue frustration and waiting.

**Reporting/recording of the incident:**

- All biting incidents should be reported to the parent via phone or face to face contact. A detailed account of the incident should also be recorded in the child's communication booklet;.
- In light of transmission of disease via bodily fluid, all biting incidents should be recorded in the accident/incident record book.

**Interactions with families:**

- All children and families have a right to privacy of personal information. The names of the child who has bitten and the child who has been bitten (and their families) must be kept confidential at all times. Staff are not to disclose this information to either party or to other parents.
- Both groups of parents need reassurance about their child and the progress of the plan of action that staff are implementing at the centre. Staff must attempt to keep both families informed of their child's progress on a daily basis.
- Staff must support parents to engage in positive guidance strategies to ensure consistency of care and guidance strategies between home and school. This may involve informal discussion with parents and modeling of specific teaching strategies in the classroom situation.
- Staff must seek assistance from the centre director and Director of Pedagogy who will support them in developing a plan of action to positively address biting behaviours in the classroom. The centre director and Director of Pedagogy will also support staff in working closely with parents.
- Staff should also seek to make written information available on the subject of managing biting to further support the parent in understanding the child's behaviour.

**Evaluation of this policy:**

A review of this policy and implementation procedures will be undertaken every two years. This review will be undertaken collaboratively between the Principals and staff of the EtonHouse Education Centre. This policy was ratified April 2014. This policy will be reviewed April 2016.

**Reference list:**

Arthur, L. Beecher, B. Dockett, S. Farmer, S. and Death, E. (1996). *Programming and planning in early childhood settings*. (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). Australia: Harcourt Brace.

**For further reading:**

Mooney, C.G. (2005). *Use your words*. St Paul; MN: Redleaf Press.