

OPG43 Temper Tantrums and Biting Fact Sheet

The critical aspect of behaviour management is consistency so that children learn the boundaries, and it is just as important to maintain this consistency between nursery and home. The purpose of this factsheet is to give some general pointers and is a tool for you to discuss with your Key Person, agreeing what you will actually do.

Why do children have temper tantrums and/or bite?

- Poor vocabulary, not having the verbal skills to express themselves.
- General development and cognitive ability.
- Inability to control their feelings, especially anger.
- To get their own way.
- To increase their status and/or power within the family hierarchy.
- Change of circumstances at home or at nursery, making them unsettled.
- Potential medical issues for instance pain or not feeling well, or autistic spectrum disorder type characteristics
- Inconsistent management.

It is important to mention that most children behave appropriately most of the time and all children behave inappropriately at some time. Appropriate and inappropriate behaviours are both learnt and it is therefore important to teach children what is suitable through positive reinforcement.

Tactics that are known to work

Try to prevent tantrums from happening

- Although you can never stop tantrums, because they are a normal stage of development, there are some strategies that can help to extinguish them quickly once they have started.
- If your child has a trigger (e.g. a certain situation), try and avoid it.
- Make sure your child has had sufficient sleep in the day and also at night and your child is not hungry. All can lower our defences and tolerance.
- Know the warning signs so you can be in control of what happens next.
- Distraction. Once you have seen the warning signs, act and distract your child. It's a bit like swerving to prevent an accident. If you know your child is likely to have a tantrum, distract them with something they like. This is not rewarding negative behaviour, but is about trying to stop a behaviour pattern from becoming entrenched.

Be consistent

- Give warnings about changes to routine or an activity in 5–10-minute intervals so your child begins to start thinking about doing something different. For example, 'We're going out in 5 minutes. I'd like you to start finishing what you are doing.'
- Being calm, clear, and consistent yourself. This helps you stay in control and helps you to set a good example to your child by being a good role model.
- Agree how you will deal with a behaviour within your family and also with your Key Person.

Be positive

- Make positive comments, encouraging and rewarding appropriate behaviour.
- Good behaviour should always be rewarded with lots of praise and attention. It can seem difficult as you will not be saying 'Well done for not having a temper tantrum' but it is a valuable tool if you know your child could 'blow' in a certain situation and they don't. In this instance it is powerful to say 'Well done for remaining calm.'



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- Children learn that when they do something good, they get lots of attention.
 - Recognition - should be immediate
should be used every time at first and then less often, as it gets easier
should always be linked with praise
praise should be **specific**. Rather than say 'You are a good girl', say 'Well done for sitting so nicely at the table.'
 - Use positive language. Try to tell your child what you want them to do, rather than what you don't want them to do, for instance instead of saying 'Don't let go', say 'Hold on tight'.
 - Involve children in decision making – give them limited choices, for example, of what toys they want to get out, or whether to use a small or large spoon at lunchtime, or have carrots or peas.
 - Encourage sharing and negotiation from an early age and involve children in decisions. This is the first step to being able to deal with conflict.
 - Encourage responsibility – for instance, getting out the spoons at breakfast time.

Be specific

- Explain beforehand about expected behaviour, and agree this together within your family and with your Key Person.
- Positive reinforcements should be specific, relating to the desirable behaviour, and should be frequent and specific – e.g. 'Well done Molly, you tried very hard with...'
- Make consequences very clear and again agree these with all concerned. Any consequences should be proportionate to the misbehaviour and immediate.
- Guide children by breaking up tasks into smaller steps, so they are more achievable and can manage their frustration. Make a visual timetable if it helps.
- When explaining to your child about the misbehaviour, say how unhappy or sad we are with the behaviour, not the child.
- Help children understand the effects of their behaviour on others once they have calmed down and feeling more rational.
- Help children deal with their emotions by labelling them, e.g. 'I can see you are angry because...'

When a tantrum or biting occurs

- Initially ignore your child (avoid eye contact) and pay attention to someone or something else, e.g. the child who has been bitten, or any others who might be present or on a task you are doing. Stay positive, happy and in control. In this way, you are communicating that their behaviour has no effect on you.
- After the event, immediately after they have calmed down tell your child in an explicit and concise manner that you will not tolerate it and then continue the day. Do not refer to it again.

What do we do at nursery?

We clearly follow all the above and we also do what is known as an event sample, each and every time the unwanted behaviour occurs.

Antecedent: what was happening just before the unwanted behaviour?

Behaviour: what was the actual behaviour?

Consequence: what happened next and what did those around do?

We will also talk to you, to understand the patterns you can see at home. When we work in partnership and do enough event samples, we will eventually see a pattern and can then start to make an action plan. Once you can see a pattern and start to tackle the unwanted behaviour, significant improvements can be seen within two weeks.