

The Early Years Centre Nursery Physically Harmful Behaviour Policy

2023-24

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Lead Reviewer(s) | Nursery Manager

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1. Introduction

Young children may exhibit physically harmful behaviours due to various reasons such as frustration, lack of communication skills or attention-seeking. It is important for caregivers to address such behaviour appropriately, with a calm and firm approach. Strategies like setting clear boundaries, teaching appropriate ways to communicate needs, and redirecting their attention to positive activities can be effective in managing and reducing physically harmful actions in young children. With severe incidents, seeking professional help from specialists such as child psychologists or behaviour therapists may be necessary if these behaviours persist or escalate.

2. Aims and Objectives

These guidelines aim:

- to provide support for a better understanding about why the use of physically harmful behaviour may occur.
- to explain how incidents are managed.
- to outline the steps to be taken to protect a child’s health and safety while at the Nursery.
- to ensure that there is a consistent approach from all teaching staff in the Nursery.

3. Why do some children bite?

Biting is a natural developmental stage that many children go through. It is usually a temporary display of behaviour and commonly occurs between one and two years of age. Evidence suggests that up to a quarter of all children will bite others at some stage. Biting other children may occur as natural part of development when children do not have yet the communication skills (verbal and non-verbal) to negotiate sharing toys, rules and personal boundaries. At the GEMS Wellington Academy Nursery, we understand that this is a difficult situation for parents whether it is your child that has been bitten or your child is biting others.

Possible reasons:

- **Teething** – swelling gums can be painful and cause discomfort; this can be relieved by biting or chewing on something.
- **Exploration** – babies and young children explore the world around them using their senses. Young children do not always know the difference between gnawing on a toy and biting someone.
- **Attention** – when children are in situations where they feel they are not receiving enough attention, biting is a quick way of becoming the centre of attention.
- **Frustration** – children can be frustrated by a number of things such as wanting to be independent and do things for themselves and not having the vocabulary to express themselves clearly. This can lead to biting as a way of dealing with this frustration.

4. Why do some children hit/scratch/push?

Young children hit, kick and scratch because they may not yet have developed the ability to regulate their emotions or communicate their needs and feelings effectively. Although toddlers have already some control over their emotions, they still have limited language to express what they want and limited skills to cope with their frustrations. They may hit, kick, scratch, pinch or grab other people's hair or body parts when they are frustrated, angry, scared, or seeking attention. They may also imitate behaviours they have seen from others or use physically hurtful actions as a way to assert their dominance or defend their belongings. It is essential to teach children non-physical and unharmed ways to express themselves and to model positive behaviour (also see Behaviour for Learning Policy).

Possible reasons:

- **Communication of emotions** – the child might be, for example, hungry, tired/exhausted or overwhelmed by the busyness of their surroundings (physical and social 'noise'). Moreover, everyone can have a bad day, or be 'cranky' and moody. Toddlers do not have yet the communication skills and skills to cope with these feelings.
- **Weak Executive Functions** – 'Executive functions' help humans to regulate their emotions; they act as the "Air Traffic Control" system of our brain. Young children have only emerging executive functions but when a child experiences severe difficulties with self-regulating emotions and hence controlling impulses, they may engage in hitting, scratching and other physically harmful behaviour. Please note, that most of the development of executive functions take place at the age of five years old (Best et al. 2009).
- **Lack of boundaries and routines** – children thrive with consistent routines and clear boundaries. These provide young children with the needed orientation throughout the day. Boundaries help children to feel safe, make choices and know what is expected of them of

them. Lack of consistent boundaries and routines can cause stress as children feel overburdened with making their own decisions that they are not ready for. It can also cause anxieties as children experience their caregiving as unpredictable.

- **Defending personal space and belongings** – Children get upset if others take their toys, invade their play space or are disappointed when they do not get a turn.
- **Imitation/Mirroring** – children may copy older siblings/children or adults they have seen successfully using physical actions to push, fight to get things or to establish their dominance.
- **Underlying additional physical, emotional or developmental needs** – children may face challenges with their sensory integration, language development or ability to pay attention and regulate emotions. Children might have experienced trauma or abuse in their life and their brain is conditioned to fight as a defence strategy.

5. What the Nursery expects of parents:

- We appreciate that it can be distressing for parents if their child has been bitten, hit or scratched or, has bitten, hit or scratched someone. It is important that we encourage parents to speak to staff about any concerns they may have in a calm manner.
- Staff need to explain that we cannot give any information about any other children involved in any incidents, and we will not disclose who has caused harm to a child or who their child has hurt.
- The key to putting a stop to any challenging behaviour is by using a partnership approach. We encourage parents to work with the Education Team to support any behaviour management strategies and use these at home as well as at Nursery.
- If a child's reoccurring behaviour is having a negative impact on their child's experience at the Nursery, we will work closely with all involved to reduce and eliminate these issues. This may include referral for therapy or the need for additional support at school (which will be at a cost to the parent).
- If all procedures are exhausted, then we may have no choice but to re-evaluate if the Nursery is able to meet the child's needs.

6. What the Nursery expects of staff:

- It is the responsibility of the Education Team to investigate why a child is using physical force or bite. This may have been an isolated incident, but we will always use an Incident Form (**Annex 1: Incident Form**) to look at what happened just before the incident.
- If the form identifies a possible trigger for the incident, we will then make changes to reduce or remove the cause. During the investigation stage, we may temporarily increase the supervision of a child that is causing harm so that we can support them to find different ways

to express themselves. The child may also benefit from shorter daily hours to manage their emotions and impulses.

- We may encourage the child to take part in activities which help release frustration such as engaging in sensorial play activities or other physical activities.
- The Education Team will encourage positive behaviour through acknowledgement and praise. We aim to intercept when we observe a child attempting to bite/scratch/hit or cause other physical harm. We commit to avoiding physically harmful behaviour by addressing the signs that could lead to an incident and speaking to the child before harm is caused. Refer to the 'Nursery Behaviour for Learning Policy'.

7. What happens if a child has used physically harmful behaviour?

- If we see a child causing harm, we will interrupt, take away any objects that could cause further harm and respond with a firm "No. We do not bite/hit/kick, etc. here." Staff shall remain calm and will not overreact throughout the incident. We will speak to the child seriously but calmly. For example,
 - Get down on their level.
 - Look them in the eye.
 - Say in a calm, firm voice, "It's OK to be mad/frustrated/upset; it's not OK to hit/bite/scratch".

Staff will avoid lengthy conversation as this re-enforces negative attention seeking, in case a need for more attention is the root cause.

- The harmed child will be comforted and reassured.
- The child who has caused harm will be removed from the immediate play space to another environment.
- The harmed child will be taken to the clinic.
- The parents of both children will be notified about each incident. A summary of the communication will be recorded on PULSE each time. If a bite/kick/scratch has broken or bruised the skin (caused any injury), parents will be contacted by telephone by the teacher before pick-up time so that they are aware that their child has been hurt and the circumstance.
- If this is a recurring situation, the child who is causing harm will be monitored closely to see what the triggers are for this behaviour. Equally, if a child is using physically harmful behaviour more than once, we will look closely at the child's behaviour to see if there are any triggers that provoke such behaviour. (See **Annex 2: ABC Monitoring Behaviour Log**)
- **After 3 occurrences** (an occurrence may refer to more than 1 incident if the behaviour took place within a short period of time, triggered by the same situation, e.g. consecutively biting 2 different children for the same reason), a meeting will be arranged with the parents, to discuss triggers and supporting techniques.

- **After another 2 occurrences**, the teacher, Nursery Manager and SENCo will arrange a meeting with the parents to discuss a behaviour plan with the support of the SENCo. (see **Annex 3: Behaviour Strategy Plan**) Parents will be expected to work in partnership to address the unwanted behaviour.
- If the occurrence is **not the first occurrence within the day**, the school will ask that the child is collected from school. A child may also be asked to be collected if there have been regular occurrences within a short period of time (e.g. 2 occurrences on consecutive days within a week).
- Should the situation be deemed serious enough, The Academy may decide that they are no longer able to meet the additional needs of the child which could result in a child's placement being withdrawn.
- The teacher informs the Education Team of the Nursery about relevant steps in the process so that all staff members work collaboratively.

References

Best, J., Miller, P. and Jones, L. (2009) "Executive functions after age 5: Changes and correlates", *Developmental Review*, 29(3), pp. 180-200. doi: 10.1016/j.dr.2009.05.002.

Annex 1

Incident Form

Name of child being monitored: _____

DOB: _____

Staff name: _____

Occurrence* No:	Date:	Time:
Group size:		
Possible Triggers and Context (please provide details about events leading up to incident including activity type, resources available):		
Behaviour observed:		
How did the child who had hurt others behave immediately after the incident?		
Action taken by staff:		
Was the action effective?	Yes / No	
Incident relayed to the parents of all parties	Yes / No	
Entry on Pulse completed Yes / No		
Signed by staff member:		

*An occurrence means one or more incidents within a very short period of time. For example, a small group of children all try to get hold of the same toy, one child bites 2 other children. The 2 biting incidents count as 1 occasion as they are triggered by the same situation.

Annex 2: **ABC Monitoring Behaviour Log**

Name:

Class:

Date & Time	Antecedents What happened directly before the behaviour occurred 1. Attention 2. Escape (to escape a task) 3. Tangible (to get something) 4. Sensory (to feel something)	Behaviour the specific action or behaviour of interest	Consequence What happened directly after the behaviour occurred

Annex 3: Behaviour Strategy Plan

Name of Student: _____

DOB: _____

Term_half term: _____

Target	Success Criteria	Key Strategies	Comments

Teacher Name: _____

Parents Signature: _____