Tips to support biting

Biting can be a scary experience for parents/carers because it can be harmful to their child and those around them. It is important to remember biting can be a typical stage for most children. Even though it is a common stage a lot of children go through, for autistic children they may not move on from this stage. If this does happen, the first and most important thing to do is understand the purpose behind the biting. It is usually not the case of the person just being 'naughty' like some people may think.

Possible reasons why a person may bite include:

- Sensory considerations: Is the person orally hyposensitive and trying to seek some oral input? Autistic children can have difficulty in meeting their sensory needs and as a way of trying to meet these needs, we may see behaviours such as biting. In this case this is not them being aggressive they are simply trying to regulate their senses.
- Anxieties/Stimming: Are they stimming? Stimming is involuntary or voluntary strategies that a person acquires to deal with certain situations or when experiencing sensory overload for example. Biting can be an example of stimming and often by biting or chewing it helps to ease the anxieties the person is feeling.

Considerations when supporting a person that bites:

- Think Medical: Check their mouth and teeth for anything that may be causing distress or pain. Consider visiting a dentist for a full check-up.

- Observe: As we have already mentioned first and foremost, we should be identifying the underlying reasons why the person is biting. Changes to things such as a person's routine or environment can cause an involuntary response such as biting. The person is usually not able to control their response so deals with it in the only way they know how too- by biting. Looking at the root cause behind the response in the first place can help you to fix it. You may need to think about questions such as, what was going on before the behaviour happened? Is the person biting the same person/themselves every time or is it different people? You can monitor and record possible triggers and patterns by using an ABCD chart. You can find a copy of an ABCD chart within the emotional wellbeing section of our family resources website.

- Provide appropriate outlets and distractions to meet their sensory needs: Giving the person a task to complete that involves using their mouths can provide a welcome distraction but whilst also engaging their oral muscles. Other ideas include having snack, sucking on a lolly, or blowing bubbles. You can also get specific equipment such as ‘Chewbuddys’ or 'Chewellery’.

- Consider your response: When the person bites do you raise your voice, or respond with a certain action? They may enjoy the reaction you give when they bite so continue.

- Implement communication tools: Biting may be an attempt at communication. Provide them with tools to help them to communicate their needs and wants in a more appropriate way.

- Visuals: Can you use visuals to help explain to the person why we should try not to bite ourselves or other people? Visuals may include story books or visual stories.

- Use scaling systems: Provide the person with strategies that they can use before they reach the point of feeling like they need to bite. For some biting is a response to the person being overly excited about something, so identifying alternatives on the scaling system can be a positive outlet for the person.