

South West Yorkshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust
Barnsley Children's Therapy Services

Advice to Support Mouthing, Licking, Chewing and Biting

Name:

NHS Number:

Oral motor activities are those that involve input in and around the mouth, they can often be neglected especially as children get older. We quickly tell children to keep things out of their mouth, though many children (and adults) need this input to help them focus on learning and play.

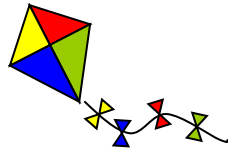
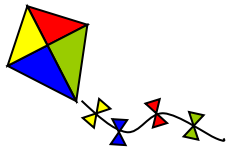
Some children need oral input almost constantly while others just occasionally.

There are number of reasons why children mouth, lick, chew and bite objects.

- **Exploration:** Mouthing can be appropriate for a child's developmental level, i.e. it is normal for an infant to mouth objects as a way of exploring.
Ways that you can develop this.... increase tactile experiences for hands and body; increase oral motor experiences during meal times & snacks
- **Proprioception:** Mouthing can provide proprioceptive input which can have a calming or alerting effect depending on the activity. This can be provided in alternative ways by increasing the range of 'Heavy work' activities that your child completes (see additional sheets for ideas) or trial an electric toothbrush to provide increased tactile input
- **Tactile:** Some children may enjoy the 'feel' of objects in their mouth. Generally increasing tactile experience (through hands, feet & body) will help to reduce the need to use the mouth but also introducing crunchy chewy foods at snack/ meal times
- **Taste:** Children may like the taste of objects (licking glass & metal can be a favourite) this is often a way of seeking very specific tastes so is useful to look at their whole diet and introduce similar tastes into meals & snacks
- **Self-regulation:** A child may try to gain or avoid sensory information to meet their sensory/ emotional needs (see proprioception above)
- **Communication:** Biting can be a way of expressing frustration, especially if they have difficulty voicing their needs or emotions. Providing alternative communication systems such as Makaton or visuals may help before language develops

Below are a few strategies that promote individuals safety (by replacing unsafe oral behaviours with safer ones), whilst meeting their sensory needs (just stopping an activity often results in it being swapped for another one).

- Chewy foods – dried fruits, liquorice, bagels, cereal bars, popcorn and gum etc.
- Crunchy foods – crackers, bread sticks, Ryvita, crackling, carrots, celery etc.
- Resistive sucking – using curly straws, sports bottle with long straw, lolly pops, sucking milk shake or thin angel delight through a straw.



- Blowing activities – bubbles, “snake party blowers”, splatter paintings (use thin paint on paper, blow air through a straw and watch the paint move), blow football.
- Vibrating toothbrush - this can assist with organization and alertness; but responses can vary therefore ensure you can offer alerting or calming intervention as required.
- Some children need more highly flavoured foods – ketchup, sauces, vinegar, gravy etc. These condiments may be needed initially to get the child used to new foods.
- Chewelry is a range of safe, non-toxic, chewable jewellery which can be used to redirect children from chewing on their clothes, pencils or other non-food objects. A range of designs are available offering different amounts of resistance and wearability to meet individual need.

**Contact Childrens Therapy if further advice or information is required
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