

Puppy Mouthing and Play Biting

Biting is one of the most common complaints made by owners of puppies and adolescent dogs. Puppies have very sharp teeth and during the “teething” period they seem to enjoy chewing on hands, arms, clothing, and anything else they can get their mouths on.

Just because your puppy may bite or chew does not mean that you have an aggressive or “bad” dog. Investigating things with their mouths is a natural behavior, but it does not mean that you have to endure this obnoxious behavior. There are some very simple steps you can take to teach your puppy exactly what is acceptable- and what isn’t. Before starting the following exercise, be sure to have a couple of your pup’s favorite toys nearby. And remember: *consistency is the key to effective training.*

Steps To Prevent Puppy Mouthing

- Avoid putting your hands near your puppy’s mouth or using your hands to play.
- Play with an appropriate toy. This can be a ball, rope, stuffed toy, or any other toy your dog likes. If your pup has a tendency to chew toys apart or swallow pieces, DO NOT leave them unsupervised with these toys.
- If your puppy puts his mouth on you (even if it doesn’t hurt) or grabs your clothes, give a loud, high-pitched “yelp” or “ouch!” Make sure it is loud enough to distract the puppy and cause him to let go.
- As soon as the puppy is distracted (lets go of your fingers), immediately encourage him to play with the toy. Redirecting the puppy’s attention is key! Otherwise the puppy will stay focused on your fingers.
- Should the puppy decide to grab your hand (foot, shirt, etc.), again, give a loud “Ouch” and redirect his attention as before.
- Give your puppy lots of praise when he has the toy in his mouth instead of your hand.
- If your puppy seems persistent about biting you, DO NOT continue to play with the pup. Simply ignore him. Ignoring means NO playing, touching, talking to, or even looking at the puppy. By ignoring the pup, you are conveying that each time they bite you the object of interest is removed.
- In some cases your puppy may need a “time out.” Put the puppy in his crate NOT as a punishment!! Be sure to reinforce the crate as a good place by giving the puppy appropriate chew toys while allowing him to calm down for a few minutes.

***If you follow these steps in a consistent manor with your puppy training your puppy will soon realize what is appropriate and inappropriate behavior and learn to keep his teeth to himself!*

Adult Nipping and Mouthiness

Adult dogs that exhibit excess grabby oral behaviors do so because they have not been properly schooled as youngsters. They may nip you or grab people by the arm to indicate their wishes or admonitions. Being nipped and grabbed by your dog against your will is a fairly distressing consequence for an owner. The correct way for an owner to deal with such a problem is to



immediately implement a "leadership" program in which the dog must learn that all good things in life come from you – and for a price. One common name for such a program is “Nothing in Life is Free.”

As for adult nipping, avoid circumstances that can lead to nipping while working on the leadership program. If nipping or grabbing occurs do not shout, try to wave your arms around, or pull away. Instead, "turn to stone" and reward the dog when he lets go and stops nipping. A refinement of this approach to management of the mouthy dog is to arm yourself with a clicker and/or delicious food treats and ignore him when he engages in any rude and rough nipping behavior. The clicker is clicked and the food treat is supplied when his nipping ceases. Specifically, 3 seconds after a bout of mouthy behavior stops you should click, say "good dog," and offer him a food treat. For more frenetic nippers, a head halter with training lead attached can be employed as negative reinforcement to increase the frequency of the desired behavior – i.e. letting go when instructed!

