



Puppy Biting & Mouthing

Puppies bite everything — including us! Always reward appropriate teeth-off play and withdraw from inappropriate nipping.

Tug-of-war is a great game of noncontact, controlled rough housing.

Puppies spend lots of time playing, chewing and investigating, and they do it all with their mouths. They playfully bite and mouth our hands, limbs and clothing. Because puppies' teeth are so sharp, it's understandable why puppy parents can't wait for puppies to outgrow this stage, but patience is the order of the day. Getting frustrated and then getting physical with your puppy will backfire. Just remember the "3 Do's": 1) recognize when puppy is tired and give him a quiet place to rest, 2) give puppy a chewy whenever you pet him, and 3) walk away if he bites.

Help Your Puppy Get It Right

Dogs need to learn to be polite with their mouths, just like young children learn not to slap or hit with their hands. Here's how to teach your puppy:

- Substitute a toy or chew bone when your puppy tries to gnaw on fingers or toes.
- When petting your puppy, make it a point to give him something to chew on other than your hand. As you pet with one hand, offer a chewy in the other. You might need to experiment to find a toy he likes. A food-stuffed Kong usually works wonders.
- Pet your puppy on his shoulders or under his chin, rather than on top of his head. It can make him less likely to mouth or bite your hand.
- Encourage noncontact forms of play, such as fetch and tug-of-war, rather than wrestling and rough play with your hands. Keep tug toys in your pocket or nearby. If he starts to mouth you, quickly redirect him to the toy. Eventually, he'll anticipate the routine and look for a toy whenever he feels like mouthing.
- Provide a variety of high value chews and toys, but limit the number you have out (2 or 3 at most) and rotate them every few days, putting the current ones away and bringing a couple "new" ones out. This will help maintain your puppy's interest in his toys.
- Whenever possible, let your puppy play with other puppies and friendly adult dogs. It's good for his development, and he'll be less inclined to play roughly with you.



- When puppies become overly stimulated and overly tired but still want to keep going, they seem to lose what little self-control their young minds and bodies have been able to develop. New puppy parents need to learn to recognize when their puppies are overwhelmed and need some private, quiet time to nap and rest. This is especially important when puppies are growing up in families with children.

What NOT to Do

- Avoid wrestling, rough housing with your hands, wiggling your fingers in your puppy's face or slapping the sides of her face to play. All this encourages your puppy to see your hands as play toys and bite them.
- Avoid jerking your hands or feet away from your puppy when she nips. This can excite him to jump and grab at you.
- Slapping, hitting or nose bopping puppies to punish playful mouthing is never recommended. Using your hands for discipline can make your puppy afraid of your hands (causing future handling problems), or encourage her to bite at them even harder, or both!
- Avoid scruff shaking, pinning down, nose slapping, sticking your fingers down your puppy's throat, or other punishments that hurt or scare puppies. These harsh techniques are ill advised for such normal developmental puppy behavior and can cause more serious behavior problems, such as fear and aggression.

Use Gentle but Effective Take-Away Punishment

If redirecting your biting puppy to toys doesn't work, use take-away punishment. What she wants is attention and play. So they are the goodies you take away the instant she nips.

- **Ouch & Freeze** The instant you feel your puppy's teeth touch you, say "OUCH!!" as you remove your hand (or make it limp), and freeze into a statue. Stay frozen and ignore your puppy for 5–10 seconds. Then pick up a toy and restart calm play. If she nips again, repeat the procedure. Repeat *consistently* to teach your puppy that biting makes play end (bummer!) and playing nicely with you with toys makes play continue (yippee!).
- **Ouch & Leave** If freezing doesn't impress your puppy much and she continues to bite you, say "OUCH!!" and immediately march out of the room without looking back, closing the door behind you, for a brief (10-second) time-out. Do this in a puppy-proofed room where there's nothing she can entertain herself with while you're gone. After your brief time-out, return to the room and calmly resume playing with her with a fun toy.
- **Oh Ick!** If Ouch & Freeze and Ouch & Leave aren't effective, you can try a taste deterrent like Grannick's Bitter Apple. Spray areas of your body and clothing that your puppy likes to mouth *before you start interacting with her*. If she bites you or your clothing, stop moving and wait for her to react to the bad taste. Praise her



lavishly when she lets go of you. Apply the deterrent to your body and clothes for 2–3 weeks.

- **Ankle biters** If your puppy bites at your feet and ankles, carry her tug toy in your pocket. When she ambushes you, stop moving your feet. Take out the tug toy and wiggle it enticingly. When she grabs it, praise and start moving again. If you don't have a toy available, praise her happily when she stops, then get a toy to reward her. Repeat these steps until your puppy gets used to your movement without going after your feet.
- **Patience!** Playful nipping is normal for puppies and young dogs. The discomfort of teething (which occurs between 16 to 24 weeks of age) can also make them want to mouth our hands because the soft pressure feels good on their gums.