



Normal Puppy Behavior: Nipping and Bite Inhibition

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When puppies play with each other, they use their mouths. Therefore, puppies usually want to bite or "mouth" hands during play or when being petted. With puppies, this is rarely aggressive behavior in which the intent is to do harm. Because puppies are highly motivated to exhibit this type of behavior, attempts to suppress it or stop it are unlikely to be successful unless you give your puppy an alternative behavior. The goals of working with this normal puppy behavior are to redirect your puppy's desire to put something in her mouth onto acceptable chew toys and to teach her to be gentle when a hand is in her mouth.

How to Teach Bite Inhibition and Stop Nipping

- Play interactive games with your dog to teach it acceptable play behavior.
- Find well-socialized adult dogs to teach your puppy bite inhibition. Dogs are more immediate and effective than humans at correcting puppies. They give a warning growl to let the puppy know it is biting a little too hard before they snap or bark at the puppy. Your puppy will need to spend plenty of time with lots of other dogs; find friends and neighbors with non-aggressive adult dogs.
- Redirect your dog to an acceptable toy when it tries to nip at your hand or shoes. Reward your puppy for playing quietly by itself and for chewing on good objects. Have lots of stuffed Kongs or bones ready for your dog.
- Don't get angry while your dog is learning. The angrier you get, the more anxious your dog becomes. If dogs are anxious they are more likely to bite or jump.
- Don't ever wear gloves to play with a nipping dog. The dog will bite harder before you feel it. It may teach the dog that biting hands is fun.
- If your puppy continues to try and nip at you, give it social isolation. If you have repeatedly said "ouch" without result, start saying ouch and leave the room. Go into the bathroom for a few seconds. You can also give the dog a short time out in his crate. A timeout means the puppy does not get any social contact for a very short period of time. This teaches the puppy that nipping will not get the attention it wants. Make sure timeouts are obvious by covering the crate with a dark blanket and not giving the puppy attention. When the puppy nips, take the dog by the collar and put him in his crate. Don't say "come" or "kennel" as this is confusing.

Hand Feeding

- Never feed your puppy out of a bowl. Hand feed it or make it eat out of a Kong. Eating out of a Kong will make your dog work for his dinner.
- Hand feed your dog his dinner. Hand feeding teaches the dog to take food from your hand without biting skin. If your puppy bites your finger too hard, say "ouch" like you have been mortally wounded and put the kibble in the bowl. Give the dog another chance to take the food from your hand. If they bite you again put the kibble in the bowl on the counter and walk away for 5 seconds. Resume the feeding after a break.
- Make sure to praise your dog when it nicely takes food or treats from your hand.

Bite inhibition needs to be taught before the dog gets its adult teeth. Start teaching bite inhibition as soon as your puppy comes home.

Encourage Acceptable Behavior

Redirect your puppy's chewing onto acceptable objects by offering her a small rawhide chew bone or other type of chew toy whenever you pet her. This technique can be especially effective when

children want to pet her. As you or the child reach out to scratch her behind the ears (not over the head) with one hand, offer the chew bone with the other. This will not only help your puppy learn that people and petting are wonderful, but will also keep her mouth busy while she's being petted. Alternate which hand does the petting and which one has the chew bone. At first, you may need to pet or scratch your puppy for short periods of time, since the longer she's petted, the more likely she is to get excited and start to nip.

Jumping Up

When your puppy jumps up on you, she wants attention. Whether you push her away, knee her in the chest or step on her hind legs, she's being rewarded for jumping up (even though it's negative attention, she's still getting what she wants).

When your puppy jumps up:

- Fold your arms in front of you, and turn away from her.
- Continue to turn away from her until all four of her feet are on the ground, then quietly praise her and give her a treat. If she knows the "sit" command, give the command when all four of her feet are on the ground, then quietly praise her and give her a treat while she's in the sitting position.
- When you begin to praise her, if she begins to jump up again, simply turn away and repeat step two, above. Remember to keep your praise low-key.

When your puppy realizes that she gets no attention from you while she's jumping up, but does get attention when she stops jumping up and sits, she'll stop jumping up. Remember, once you've taught her to come and sit quietly for attention, you must reward her behavior. Be careful not to ignore her when she comes and sits politely, waiting for your attention.

What Not To Do

Attempts to tap, slap or hit your puppy in the face for nipping or jumping up are almost guaranteed to backfire. Several things may happen, depending on your puppy's temperament and the severity of the correction:

- She could become "hand-shy" and cringe or cower whenever a hand comes toward her face.
- She could become afraid of you and refuse to come to you or approach you at all.
- She could respond in a defensive manner and attempt to bite you to defend herself.
- She could interpret a mild slap as an invitation to play, causing her to become more excited and even more likely to nip.

Never play "tug-of-war" or wrestling games with your puppy if you're having a nipping problem. These types of games encourage out-of-control behavior, grabbing, lunging and competition with you. These aren't behaviors you want her to learn.

A Note About Children And Puppies

It's very difficult for children under eight or nine years old to practice the kind of behavior modification outlined here. Children's first reaction to being nipped or mouthed by a puppy is to push the puppy away with their hands and arms. This will be interpreted by the puppy as play and will probably cause the puppy to nip and mouth even more. Dogs should never be left alone with children under ten and parents should monitor closely all interactions between their children and dogs.