

THE BITE STOPS HERE

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Dogs use their mouths to explore the world. Puppies mouth and bite as a way of learning about the strength of their jaws. Using their mouths is very natural for dogs but as their caretakers we need to teach them what is appropriate use of their mouth with humans.

Puppies have razor sharp teeth and very little jaw strength. This was nature's design to help pups learn what is called bite inhibition. Puppies play with each other using their mouths. A hard bite on another pup will result in a dramatic yelp and abrupt end of play by the offended party. This is how pups learn to keep their bites soft (inhibited). Well-socialized adult dogs play-bite each other often with no offense or damage. If you are dealing with a puppy that still has his baby teeth the simplest method is to react as his littermate would when he bites. When the puppy is biting during play and using a soft mouth, you can simply ignore it and redirect him to a toy or other appropriate chewie. If he bites hard, a loud, sharp "ouch" will usually get the puppy's attention. The sound you are trying to imitate could also be described as a wounded screech. *Immediately* withdraw your attention and leave the pup for a few minutes. Often only a minute or two is all that is required. Return to the pup and resume the activity before the bite. If the pup bites again, repeat your response. You should see some improvement within 3-6 repetitions in a session. You want to see improvement from week to week. Be patient, your pup may get worse for a short time as he figures out the rules.

If you are not getting results the problem could be in several areas:

- ☞ Your "ouch" is not dramatic enough. Remember, you are attempting to imitate an injured pup. Their cries are dramatic and get attention. Your "ouch" should be loud and startling to the pup. Some people need to practice this to get the true dramatic effect that another pup would deliver.
- ☞ If there are multiple family members, everyone must be consistent. Failure to have the same standard only confuses the pup and will randomly reward the mouthy behavior, which will only make it stronger.
- ☞ You may be randomly reinforcing the behavior by paying attention to the pup. *Remember, the game ends abruptly the second he bites too hard.* It is very important that the bite causes you to withdraw attention not give it, even in the form of reprimands. Many pups will take reprimands, especially physical punishments such as grabbing the muzzle or shaking, as an invitation to escalate the game and he may actually start biting you more and harder.

Some puppies are much mouthier than others and have a harder mouth. It is very important to be especially consistent with these pups. It is also important that you provide legal safe outlets for biting and chewing for all puppies. If your puppy seems out of control or over-stimulated, the best thing to do is to calmly put him in his crate with his Kong or other chewie for a nap. He will soon learn that biting and over the top behavior will end good things.

Children should be closely supervised with dogs and taught how to safely interact. Avoid games that encourage the dog to chase and nip at the child. One option includes having a toy that the dog can carry in his mouth while with a child. Teach your dog games that use their brain instead of their mouth. Hide and seek with toys or people is a great alternative to chasing games. Another idea is to practice obedience training during play sessions.

Teach your dog to gently take food from your hand. One way to accomplish this is to feed your dog his meals out of your hand for several weeks. You can also use this time to practice obedience behaviors.

CHEWING

Destructive chewing on items is predictable and preventable. Dogs chew to exercise their jaws and relieve stress. The first thing to do is puppy-proof your home by picking up shoes, socks, children's toys, etc. until the pup is past the chewing phase and has grown up a bit.

Chewing is often connected to teething for puppies. Between 5-10 months your pup will lose his milk teeth and his permanent teeth will come in and be set in his jaw. During this time your pup *must* chew. Supervise and direct him to appropriate chewables. If left alone in a room he may choose furniture, walls, clothing or whatever is available. He does not do this because he is bad but because he must chew. Some dogs enjoy chewing throughout their lives. Early management and training will help them develop habits that will be safe for their lifetime. When you see your pup begin to put his mouth on something you don't want him to chew, interrupt him with "Ah, ah!" and then redirect him to his own chew toy.

APPROPRIATE CHEW TOYS

Do not give your dog old shoes, socks or human toys. He will not be able to tell the difference between "his" shoes and "your" shoes. Also, do not give the dog too many toys as he may think everything on the floor is his. Giving your dog 4-6 toys at a time is plenty. You can keep the others in a box and rotate them.

Match toys to your dog's size, activity level and personal preference. Vinyl and stuffed toys can be great for games but may not be safe to leave with your dog. Sturdier toys include Kongs, Busy Buddy products, Nylabones and sterilized hollow bones. These can be filled with the dog's meals and/or smeared with a bit of peanut butter or cheese to build the dog's interest. Teething puppies might enjoy frozen treats to help soothe their gums. Always supervise your dog with any new toy or chewie to make sure they do not break off or ingest pieces that might cause blockages. One guideline is that the dog should not be able to break off any pieces larger than their kibble. However if a dog is easily disassembling and ingesting a non-edible toy, immediately remove the toy.