



BEHAVIOR
SERIES

Dealing with Normal Puppy Behavior

Nipping and Rough Play

IT'S NOT ALWAYS EASY TO CONVINCE A NEW PUPPY not to bite the hand that feeds him...pets him...or plays with him, for that matter. When puppies play with each other, they use their mouths, so they may also be inclined to bite or "mouth" your hand during play or when being petted. This is rarely aggressive behavior meant to do harm, but it is a difficult habit to break unless you encourage your puppy to try an acceptable alternative behavior. The goal is to redirect your puppy's energy onto acceptable chew toys and to teach her to be gentle when a hand is in or near her mouth.

Encourage Acceptable Behavior

Redirect your puppy's penchant for nipping and biting by offering her more acceptable objects (such as chew toys) whenever you pet her. This technique can be especially effective when children want to pet her. As you or the child reaches out to scratch her behind the ears with one hand, offer the chew toy 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 toy. You may need to start off by petting or scratching 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.

Discourage Unacceptable Behavior

You must also teach your puppy to be gentle with hands and show her that nipping results in unpleasant consequences. Teach your puppy that nipping "turns off" any attention and social interaction with you. As soon as a nip occurs, look your puppy right in the eye and yell "OUCH" as though you've been mortally wounded. Then ignore her. Leave the room if you must, but ignore her until she's calm, and then try the chew toy and petting method again.

Jumping Up

When your puppy jumps up on you, she wants attention. Even if you push her away, she is still getting attention (even if it is a response that you might consider negative).

When Your Puppy Jumps Up:

- Fold your arms in front of you, turn away from her, and say "off."
- Continue to turn away from her until all four paws 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 paws are on the ground, then quietly praise her and give her a treat while she's in the sitting position.
- If she begins to jump while you're praising her, simply turn away and repeat the second step, 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 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.

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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—behaviors you don't want her to learn.

Be Consistent

It's important that all behaviors, acceptable and unacceptable, be managed consistently by all family members. And remember that any method you try will probably not be effective unless you work hard to teach your puppy an acceptable alternative behavior.

A Note about Children and Puppies

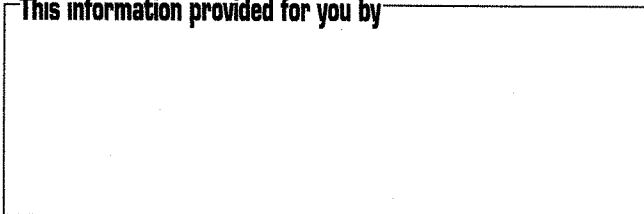
It's very difficult for children under eight or nine years old to practice the kind of behavior modification outlined here. Children's first reaction to being nipped or mouthed by a puppy is to push the puppy away with their hands and arms. This will be interpreted by the puppy as play and will probably cause the puppy to nip and mouth even more. Adults should closely monitor all interactions between their children and dogs.

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PUPPY MOUTHING, NIPPING, AND BITING – BITE INHIBITION AND TEACHING OFF

Bite inhibition

1. No hard bites or pressure.
 - (a) When the puppy is calm, place your hand in its mouth and praise it when it mouths softly.
 - (b) Give an immediate, loud 'ouch!' whenever the puppy applies too much pressure, and stop playing with it. Once the puppy ceases, you can give it an alternative form of play or attention (e.g., chew toy, exercise session, training session) or a settle exercise (see our settle exercise handout), and reward the desirable behavior.
2. Mild attempts at deterring the puppy and physically discouraging the puppy can actually serve to increase the intensity of play and biting.
3. Gentle mouthing as a form of play is OK, but it should not be initiated by the puppy, and the family must be able to stop it on command. Any hard biting or overexuberant play must be discouraged.
4. Avoid tug of war if the pet becomes too excited, aggressive, or out of control. Tug of war games should only be allowed when you have initiated them and when you can quickly stop the game on command with an ouch, give, or drop command.
5. If the puppy is constantly demanding attention through mouthing and biting or is overexuberant in its play, then it is likely not receiving sufficient stimulation. You should consider additional or longer periods of play, training, and exercise, and more outlets for chewing to pre-empt the puppy's unacceptable play biting.
6. If the puppy cannot be quickly calmed and settled, then confining it away from the target (e.g., children, visitors) until it settles may be necessary. When the puppy is calm it can then be released, and encouraged to play in an appropriate manner.
7. For those problems that cannot be quickly and effectively controlled with bite inhibition techniques, a leash and head halter can be left attached when the puppy is with the family. Mouthing or biting can be immediately stopped with a pull on the leash, with tension released as soon as the puppy settles. The leash and head halter can also be used to teach the off command by first giving the command and if the puppy does not immediately cease, pulling the hand back and guiding the dog into the proper response with a pull on the leash.
8. For some puppies in some homes, all forms of hard mouthing and play biting may be unacceptable. This may be the case when there are elderly or young children in the home.

Teaching off

The purpose of this command is to get the puppy to stop mouthing or playbiting on command.

Procedure:

1. Present a piece of food to get the pet's attention, say 'OK' in a friendly tone of voice and give the food.
2. Present another piece of food and say 'off' in a firm tone of voice, but don't yell.
 - (a) If the puppy doesn't make contact with your hand or the food for two seconds, say 'OK' and give up the food.
 - (b) If the puppy touches your hand before the two seconds pass and before you say 'OK,' immediately yell 'off' loud enough to make the puppy back away without frightening it. Be dramatic, lean toward the pup, make eye contact, and give a forceful command.
 - (c) Repeat, gradually increasing the time the puppy has to wait.
3. Once the pup learns to back away from food on command, practice the above exercise using only your hand. Later, repeat the exercise when the puppy is in more excited moods.
4. Work toward the puppy not taking food, or touching your hand, no matter how tasty the treat or how your hand is moving, once you have said 'off.'
5. You must practice every day to attain a dependable response.

Help!! My Puppy is Biting!

While it won't heal those punctures on your hands and make ankles any faster, it may be comforting to know that if you may be comforting to know that your puppy is biting, you are not alone. In fact, mouthing and biting are normal (but not desirable) behaviors and essentially all puppies will bite. The *good* news is that as your puppy gets older, much of the nipping and mouthing will disappear, particularly if you don't encourage it through aggressive play. Fortunately, most biting done by puppies is playful and there are several ways you can discourage your puppy from choosing you as a target.



- **Avoid Aggressive play.** Tug - of- war, wrestling and boxing at the puppy's mouth with your hands will get your puppy excited and teach her that hands are appropriate chew toys.
- **Redirect the puppy to appropriate toys.** Virtually all puppies will need to chew on something, so make sure there are plenty of acceptable chew toys available. If your puppy attacks your hand, ankle, or clothing, offer him a favorite toy instead. When he goes for the toy give him lots of praise and attention.
- **Practice the high yip.** When play between puppies gets too rough, the one being bitten will give a high-pitched, piercing yip. This will startle most puppies and cause them to stop biting for a moment. You can mimic the high yip, then withdraw your hand and substitute something else.
- **Use a Gentle Leader Collar.** The Gentle Leader gives you an effective way to control a puppy's head and mouth. If your puppy starts to go for a hand, pull gently and steadily on the lead. As soon as he stops, release the pressure and praise him.
- **Keep your fingers curled.** Many puppies will not bite at a closed fist as they will an open hand.
- **Use time-out.** If your puppy gets too riled up, won't listen to you and immediately starts to bite again after you've tried some other approaches, then isolating her for a brief period may be needed.
- **Supervise play between kids and puppies.** Many children are not able to use these techniques on their own and will need your help. Puppies learn quickly and may discover that young children can be intimidated by rough play and biting. Kids also like to do things that get puppies overexcited. Adult supervision will be needed until the puppy *and* the child learn how to play appropriately.