



Canine Development

Puppy Nipping: Teaching Bite Inhibition

Puppy biting ranks high on the list of problems people contact us about. Generally, people get a lot of advice on this subject before contacting us. Unfortunately, a lot of what they've been told to do actually caused the behavior to escalate.

Puppies bite! It's just a fact of their little lives. Since they do not have hands with opposing thumbs, they use their mouth to investigate things in their environment. If you ever get a chance to observe a group of puppies together, you will see that there is a lot of biting going on.

It is through this nipping and biting that pups learn to inhibit/control their biting behavior. Make sure that your puppy has plenty of appropriate outlets to exercise his need to bite. Be aware and make sure you are NOT reinforcing his biting. When he bites are you trying to grab his muzzle? Are you yelling at him to stop? Are you lunging after him, or pushing him away? These can be seen as attention from you so the puppy will learn that by biting you, he can get your attention, even if it is negative attention. They can also see it as a game and find it fun—don't use any methods but what we suggest if you want your puppy to stop biting your hands, feet, nose or any other body part! **The biting will escalate if you use any of these tactics—grabbing the muzzle and telling him “No bite!”, pushing the puppy away, yelling at him, popping him on the snout**—basically if you are touching the dog in any manner and not removing the puppy (or yourself) he will find enjoyment with this new game of his. **It will not cease the behavior by any means.**

Try the following to ensure your pup is well-rested & not over-stimulated, two cause of escalating biting.

- 1) Make sure he's got a lot of down time.** Do you have kids? Do you remember how much they slept when they were little infants? Yes. About 12-16 hours a day! A puppy needs the same kind of rest. We often feel that a puppy needs lots of exercise to wear him out but usually it's the opposite. He needs lots of sleep! You want to balance small bouts of play & training & even more sleep. Your puppy should begin to be out & free from naps more frequently after he's reached 16-18 weeks. Until then he needs many, many naps. Lots of times the puppy is over-tired and it causes him to be bite-y and as many clients say, “crazy!” Don't allow your puppy to get to this state!
- 2) Yell & Exit.** As soon as puppy bites on you (no matter the caliber of the bite) you need to yell like bloody murder—“OWWWW!” then either remove yourself from the room (storm out and slam the door behind you) or immediately place the puppy in his crate/safe area. The key is consistency & reacting immediately but not with a lot of emotion (except pain when he bites—he
- 3) Freeze food & toys.** Remember when your pup is 4 and 7 months of age he will most likely be in the middle of the teething process (losing those sharp puppy teeth). Be sure your pup has lots of things to chew on. Tie a knot in a strip of old towel, wet it and froze it for a good gum rubbing toy. Or even soak your rope toy in chicken broth and freeze. Also, freeze the pup's food and anything that you can think of! If you can freeze most anything the pup puts in his/her mouth you will find the teething to lessen much quicker and easier.

These things work when they are done just as described. Also all family members have to comply and follow the same rules! It is something they understand and the offender learns to inhibit the force of his bite and soon the frequency of it. You can resume the game again after a short time out. If your puppy is biting your children, you **MUST** be supervising ALL interactions between them. If your children cannot yelp effectively, then you must do it for them.

Note: Ignoring the puppy means not speaking to it, looking at it or touching it in any way.

BE PERSISTENT & CONSISTENT! Do not do it one day and something different another day. All puppy training must remain consistent to see results.