

About Puppy Biting & How to Survive it!



Why puppies bite? We often 'play' with puppies, using our hands & mistakenly teach them to treat our hands, arms, ankles as play-toys! If puppy is over-tired or over-stimulated he may have less ability to control his biting. Puppies need a lot of sleep to make good choices! Puppies use their mouths to explore everything!

Plus, they are teething and it can alleviate some of the discomfort to chew! Chewing is a natural & instinctual behavior. Puppies often mouth or bite to get their 'needs met', just like a baby whines or cries.

Puppy Biting also has a scientific foundation as well, in what we know & understand about the 'puppy brain'. Up to about 12-14 weeks of age, your puppy's brain literally cannot control the impulse to bite. Their prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain that is responsible for impulse control or 'emotional regulation', isn't fully developed and they simply can't be thoughtful about biting yet.

When your puppy sees movement, gets excitement in play, or gets stimulated by what's happening around them, or even if he's overtired and cranky, their brain says "engage with your mouth", as with all play and excitement or when they simply are too tired to make good choices. That means they are going to bite. Be it on toys, other puppies, chews, or your body parts! They literally do not yet have any ability to override that emotional, impulsive response.

Puppy biting is developmental, not behavioral. Puppy biting at this age is like breathing, it not only is going to happen, it has to happen. Early puppy biting is how they learn about the world around them, and how they learn bite inhibition, to control the strength of their bite in play, for example. It is a stage all puppies go through, and one through which you will have to manage them.

And now, let's blow your mind with these three facts around 'Puppy Biting'.

1.) The thing that triggers the MOST biting when your puppy is young? Handling too much, too soon. Yup! Human hands! Hands just trying to give pets, hands from above, hands used to play with the puppy, hands holding or restraining the puppy. Hands putting on collars, hands trying to brush. We move way too fast and expect way too much when we present those fun, moving, interesting hands to our puppies, and expect that they will just accept it, without exploring with their mouths, without getting over-excited, without some biting! The solution is less touching, less stimulation & less over-stimulation = less biting.

2.) You can't "train away puppy biting" by punishing it. It's impulsive and emotional, not thoughtful. And, it's unfair to correct your puppy for normal puppy instincts and behaviors. Biting can decrease because you teach them 'emotional regulation' as their brain matures. Their young puppy brain learns that calm brings reinforcement; biting takes away reinforcement.

3.) Redirection alone often doesn't work. When a puppy's thinking brain is not yet well developed, redirecting is rarely connected to 'bite on this, and not that'. Redirecting can actually reinforce biting. Biting on your hands, brings out the good chew toys! You're not clearly teaching "don't bite", you might even be teaching that biting produces this fabulous toy. Oops!

Let's talk about things you can do to minimize 'Puppy Biting'.

Focus on providing opportunities, and chews, for your puppy to bite & chew appropriately.

Focus on preventing inappropriate puppy biting. Yes! Stop trying to "fix" the biting. You won't likely have much success. Your attempt to stop, can lead to more excitement, more frustration...and more biting.

Focus on teaching your puppy how to be CALM. Reinforce calm & your puppy's brain is focused on THAT behavior. They can't bite & sit calmly at the same time. These are incompatible behaviors.

Calm becomes a stronger behavior than biting because calm gets reinforced. They're not biting when they are biting when they're interested in the next reinforcement for being calm. Behavior that is reinforced is the behavior that gets repeated.

Games to teach puppy 'no teeth on me':

1. Use hand-feeding and treat delivery to teach a **soft mouth.**

a.) Deliver treats from your palm only. Puppy will use his tongue to 'lick up' the treat & he learns to use ONLY lips or tongue to take the treat - no teeth.

b.) Hand-feed portions of puppy's meal to teach that hands bring 'great' things, and are not to be bitten!

*also teach puppy how to wait for permission to take a treat rather than grabbing. Ask us how!

2. Play & Freeze - when you feel any teeth on skin or clothes. Simply stop all the fun. Hide hands behind your back; if necessary, calmly go away from puppy, taking away any fun he is having by biting.

3. Distract - distract puppy from 'attacks' or 'crazy nipping' by moving his interest to an interactive toy to get him engage elsewhere and to keep him busy until he settles down. 'Treat Dispensing' balls, 'snuffle mats' or 'puzzle toys are great options! Careful not to reinforce biting by simply giving a toy: it's best to ask for a behavior in between, like just getting his attention on you with upbeat, 'Puppy, Puppy' noises, calm, or a sit, etc. Make the toy you offer fun (or tasty) so he is more likely to stay engaged with it.

4. Collar Hold - reach for puppy's collar frequently and randomly throughout the day. Reach, hold, 'Good Boy', treat. Associate great things with you reaching towards him & holding his collar.



5. Food Choices & Permission - teaches puppy to control his 1st impulses to simply 'grab' food or toys, and begins the foundation for teaching 'permission' ('Get It'). Treat in closed hand, open hand, puppy sits to wait for treat to be delivered to him, on your palm.

6. Body Handling - teaches puppy to accept 'hands' all over his body, without nipping. Great for vet exams, grooming...and cuddles! Start when puppy is sleepy. Sit on the floor with your puppy.



Step #1: Touch as you deliver a treat, repeat 5-6X;

Step #2: touch, mark and then deliver a treat,

Step #3: Build up to touching longer or repeatedly, on different body parts, then mark and deliver a treat! Touch paws, toes/nails, ears, mouth, lips, tail, massage the length of puppy's whole body, hold puppy close. Put a t-shirt on/off puppy! Put socks on/off puppy's feet. Do a 'dry bath'.

7. Tug teaches puppy to put his teeth on appropriate toys only. 'Game On' if puppy only bites the toy: 'Game Off' if puppy's teeth touch your hand: you simply freeze & the fun stops!



Next level, hold the toy back, covered in your hands, until puppy sits, then say 'Get It' and tug starts up again! Next level is to tug, and add body massages while tugging! 'Game On'/'Game Off' is still in play! Teaching your puppy to 'give' or 'out' or 'drop' can also be a cue to use when he bites at something inappropriate. Freeze. wait. Be sure to reinforce when he does in fact let go and take his teeth away.

8. Ensure puppy gets lots of rest. He could be over-tired, over-stimulated, frustrated, and/or over-excited.

Puppy needs quiet time, naps and time to rest! If biting gets crazy, put puppy in an expen or crate. Keep puppy's routine consistent, with clarity around your expectations, so puppy is indeed less frustrated.

Tools to give puppy an outlet for chewing & teach appropriate chewing (always supervise!):

Frozen Kongs, large frozen carrots, cold antlers, large frozen Bully Sticks, stuffed frozen Toppls, licky mats, are great for chewing/licking & can prevent biting!

(hint: keep several items in your freezer so you have lots to pull out when puppy biting needs to be redirected!)

What to do when a puppy bites? First, are all his needs met? Hunger, thirst, fatigue and toileting?

Next, if necessary, freeze - all fun stops when teeth touch skin. Remove yourself altogether if necessary.

Interrupt in a positive way, engage puppy in another behavior, then give puppy an appropriate chew toy. If puppy absolutely won't stop:

1.) leave the room so puppy can realize 'nipping' makes you go away.

2.) 'Time outs' to a crate/expen is the prize for biting! "Oh boy...you win the prize!" Positive, short, 2 minute time outs are best! You'll likely find he needs a nap!

Important: Never use your hands or feet as play toys with your puppy. No yelling, no smacking, no pushing, no pinching, no sudden (fun) movements which can actually make biting worse.