

Puppy Nipping and Biting

Why? Why? Why?

The games puppies play with littermates consist mainly of tussles involving biting one another around the head and neck. Of course, when they leave their litter and we become their playmates, they attempt to play in the same way! Puppy needs to learn that the way to play with us is through toys.

Ouch! That hurts!

Watching a litter of puppies play, you might occasionally observe one puppy biting his sibling too hard. The injured party yelps and there is at least a momentary, if not semi-permanent, interruption to the game. The sharp yelp interrupts the biter's behaviour. The following interruption or end of play encourages the biter to inhibit his bite in future, in order to avoid such interruptions to his games.

Puppies will lose these needle-sharp baby teeth around four to six months of age. Let's ensure that you gain the designed benefit before that time. The puppy must learn to inhibit his bite before he has big adult teeth and a strong adult jaw to match.

Imitating the puppy litter scenario may assist your puppy to further inhibit his bite on you. Initially, only react to the more intense bites, with a puppy-like yelp or the human equivalent, a sharp "yow". Stand up and walk away from the game. When the puppy is no longer biting you as hard, you can start reacting to less intense bites, until eventually you react if the puppy's teeth even touch your skin. This technique produces a long-term learning benefit called bite inhibition. It may not always help you in the instant that the nipping or biting is occurring, particularly if young children are involved.

Don't bite me – bite this!



When playing or interacting with your puppy, ensure that a favourite toy is handy - you can use it as a substitute for your hands or limbs. Encourage the puppy to bite the toy. It may prove difficult at first, as the puppy continues to pursue your hands. Do your best to manoeuvre your hands and the toy so that teeth connect with toy, more often than hands.

Puppy needs to learn that playing with humans involves toys instead of nipping and biting flesh.

Ankle biting

A common problem spot for ankle biting is walking up and down stairs or along a hallway. It is commonly the movement that excites the puppy in these scenarios.

Keep a few toys handy at each end of the hallway. Tie them to string or rope to use to distract the puppy away from your ankles and clothing.



Time-Out

When the puppy has really lost control and the excitement of biting and nipping is just too much, a time-out may assist. Parents can implement this exercise when interacting puppies and young children. It is usually too difficult for the children to utilise for themselves.

Always use the yelping response to any biting or nipping whether it appears to be helping or not. Remember that it will achieve a long-term learning effect.

When the puppy will not settle, a time-out can be applied by crate, tie-up or by removing the puppy to the laundry or outside the back door (wherever he is familiar). Removing the puppy to his crate or pen will not result in him associating these places to punishment of time out. It is the loss of social company and end of games that is the punishment, not the crate itself.

On the first occasion, the puppy will be allowed to re-join the game after ten seconds of good behaviour. If on his return to the game, he breaks the same rule, he will be removed for 20 seconds of good behaviour, before being allowed to return. Next time will be 40 seconds, then 60 seconds. More than 60 seconds is not necessary, unless the handler needs a break.

Teething

Puppies will lose those needle-sharp teeth around five to six months of age. Ensure that you are providing plenty of chewing material to help loosen the teeth and to soothe the puppy.

Puppies usually prefer soft, spongy toys at this age. Use the harder type chews when they have their adult teeth and a strong jaw to match.

Including raw, meaty bones in the puppy's diet may also help in providing something more appropriate to chew on. As will feeding the puppy from toys such as "Kongs".



Play, Play and Then More Play

Play is so important for the puppy's development and for relationship building and bonding with his new family. Play is a means of helping puppies to develop impulse control and tolerance of frustration – similar to a two-year-old child.

Providing numerous different toys will stimulate the puppy's interaction and development. Put some toys away so that you can swap them around to provide variety.

Despite previous "bad press", **tug-of-war** is one of the most beneficial games you can play with your puppy.

It will aid in developing responsiveness to you and your commands and is great for development of a trusting relationship.

Tug-of-war does not encourage aggressive behaviour! And... IT DOESN'T MATTER WHO WINS OR LOSES!



Sitting in the doorway of a room can assist developing the retrieve of a ball or toy with the puppy chasing the item into the room. Once he has picked up the toy, he will have nowhere to go but back to you. Training can be further assisted by the use of a long line attached to the puppy's collar to enable you to block incorrect responses. A puppy that has not learnt to retrieve by 16 weeks of age is at risk of not finding enjoyment of the game throughout his lifetime. What a shame that would be!

Attaching a cord or string to a toy can enable you to make the toy more stimulating to the puppy and also establish a habit of returning to you with the toy.

Introducing tug games at a young age is also useful for identifying potential toy guarding tendencies. Treating such problems during puppyhood is more successful than having to address the problem once it has become established in the adult dog.

To train the puppy to release the tug or retrieve toy on command simply say the command, "leave", and then offer a food treat to the puppy. Hopefully he will release the toy in order to eat the treat. Further reward him by re-initiating the game after he has finished eating.

Alternatively, if the puppy is not keen to give up the toy for a food treat, gently hold your hand on the toy without pulling and hold the puppy still by his collar with your other hand - if he is particularly highly driven for the toy and still does not leave, lift him just off his front feet with your other hand. You may have to quietly hold this position for a few moments until the puppy gets bored and releases the toy. At which point, you praise and re-initiate the game. You must remain calm, non-competitive and non-threatening throughout the process.

Show your puppy that fighting and struggling with you will not achieve success for him; but working with you achieves huge success!

Roughhouse play is also wonderful for developing puppies. Children may also engage in roughhouse play if they are confident to do so. A responsible adult must supervise all interactions between children and puppies. Neither has fully developed emotional self-regulation.

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