

Mouthiness

Mouthiness is often normal a 'puppy behaviour'. However this doesn't mean it is pleasant for us or something that should be encouraged.

Below are a few important things to think about when it comes to mouthiness.

Identify the cause.

Mouthiness may be motivated by different emotions or needs at different times. This means there is not one single approach you should take.

Common motivators are: frustration, a need for social contact, teething pain, over tired, over stimulated, biological and physical frustration. Most of all, mouthiness is a form of communication.

Redirection.

If the puppy is mouthing because they want to play, redirect onto a suitable toy immediately. When you do this, don't simple push the toy into the pup's mouth and walk away, take your time to play interactively. The toy should be something that is long so the puppy is not too close to your body and comfortable for them to hold. Make sure you are having several play sessions a day.

Try to start the play sessions before the puppy becomes mouthy. When the game is over, provide your puppy with something to chew or lick at to help them calm down.

Management.

Have play pens, gates and partitions everywhere! This will also help with toilet training and chewing unsafe items. If you need to separate yourself, try to do so quickly. If you need to move the puppy into an area to separate them, grab some of the food you will have near by and toss some behind the barrier. Then give your puppy something to do like a lickimat so that they do not become frustrated. Most food puzzles can be stored in the freezer so you quickly grab one out and give to your mouthy puppy.



Separation NOT isolation.

If you need to separate yourself or children from the puppy, do. However, be careful to not use isolation as a punishment. We do not want the puppy thinking being alone is a bad thing. Some puppies need to be taught that it is ok to be behind a barrier. Start by standing on one side with the puppy on the other, perform an activity that looks like it is boring to the puppy such as cleaning or reading a book. Ensure that the puppy has good things like chews and food puzzles on their side of the barrier. Don't say anything or engage, we want them to think you are really boring but that being behind the barrier is great! Baby gates and play pens are often less stressful barriers for your puppy than a door they can not see you through. Don't think of it as a 'time out'. Your puppy is not being naughty, simply doing a normal canine behaviour.

Meet their needs.

Especially as they age, not having their social or biological needs may create frustration or pent up energy. Talk to your vet about appropriate levels of exercise but also think about what your dog's breed was originally bred to do and see if you can give a safe outlet for that. For example, my dogs are gundogs, as I am not hunting with them, I play lots of games that involve them using their sense of smell and make sure they regularly exercise in the bush.

Also make sure your puppy gets loads of sleep! If you are working from home, your puppy may wake often to follow you around, if this is the case, try to create the optimum sleep environment.

Do not punish them.

Punishment may suppress the behaviour but is likely to create mistrust and frustration. Do not try to replicate "how the mother dog disciplines". Your puppy knows you are not a dog. Smacking, scruffing or holding the puppy's mouth shut is likely to lead to your puppy building a very negative association with hands and handling may become very difficult.

Talk to your vet about pain relief.

One major contributing factor in mouthiness is that the teething process hurts! If your puppy is teething, talk to your vet about pain relief.

