

Biting Behaviors in Puppies

Congratulations on bringing home your new puppy! A new puppy can be an exciting and rewarding experience. However, along with the fun, often come some challenges for the new owners. One such challenge is a puppy that nips and bites. With the positive tips outlined below, training your puppy on proper social behavior can be a rewarding experience for both the new puppy and its owners.

Puppies are very social creatures. As young pups they are learning to play, interact and socialize with other members of their family. When the puppy was with its siblings, part of these social interactions were rough and tumble play sessions. However, during this time, the other pups would normally teach your puppy to inhibit the strength of its bite by giving a quick yelp and leaving the play session if things got too rough. Now that the puppy has left its siblings and moved in to join your family, he may not have this natural feedback about his behavior.

As the puppy's new playmate, it is your job to teach him the proper social skills. This teaching includes instructing him on what behaviors are acceptable. Even though it is cute, it is important not to allow your new puppy to chew or mouth on any part of your body without reprimand. If this behavior is allowed when your puppy is young, it will think that this behavior is acceptable. However, when the pup gets older its bite will become stronger and the habit will be hard to break. Instead, each time the puppy nips, bites or mouths on your hand, say a quick no, ouch or emit a yip sound. At the same time, immediately withdraw from the play behavior or leave the room. It is important that the puppy associate the command with the nip and immediate loss of play. These actions tell the puppy that its behavior was unacceptable. In order to minimize confusion for your puppy it is important that all family members give this consistent feedback to the puppy.

If your puppy continues to play bite, it may be necessary to employ other means to teach him to inhibit his bite. Some other methods use remote punishment or leashes to accomplish this task. Remote punishment includes shaker cans, water bottles, air horns, citronella collars and other methods. These items are not associated with the punisher, yet they frighten and/or startle the puppy when he exhibits the unwanted behavior. Once the remote punishment is associated with the play biting, the puppy will learn to play gently in order not to be sprayed or startled. Another method to manage your pups biting behavior is to use a leash and head halter. If the pup begins to play bite inappropriately, a firm, gentle tug on the leash will discourage him from the behavior. It is important to remember that physical punishment is discouraged when trying to teach your puppy to play nicely. Typically, an attempt at physical punishment, such as pushing the puppy away, grabbing his muzzle, or swatting at him, will be seen as play behaviors and will only aggravate the situation.

When training your puppy, remember that learning proper social skills is an important part of your puppy's development. It is your job as the puppy's new owner to train and encourage him. Training takes time and practice, but with patience and diligence your puppy will soon know the proper way to inhibit his bite and play appropriately.