



## Nipping puppies

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It is normal for a puppy to use their mouth during play and social interaction, but puppy teeth can definitely be sharp! It's important to teach your puppy how to use their mouth in an acceptable manner. Strategies to help include encouraging acceptable play, providing sufficient stimulation to meet their needs, teaching basic commands such as "sit" and "down," and ignoring or interrupting undesirable biting behavior.

When play biting becomes too intense or persists into adulthood, seek the advice of a veterinary behavioral specialist so you can determine the best course of action.

### **Do not make things worse**

Do not encourage your puppy's nipping behavior. Do not get your puppy excited with rough play, teasing, etc, if these lead to biting. Avoid games that encourage your puppy to attack any part of your body, and don't wear gloves during play to allow your puppy to bite.

Be careful not to inadvertently reward undesired behavior. If biting works to get your attention, the behavior will continue. Petting your dog, picking her up, talking to her, or even giving her a mild shove or light scolding can actually reward the biting behavior (as all of these are forms of attention, which is what the puppy wants). Therefore, any hard contact between your puppy's teeth and the human body should be a signal for you to cease giving attention to your dog. Immediately stopping play and ignoring your puppy (or walking away) will teach your puppy that attention and play stop when biting begins. Similarly, do not begin to play if your puppy is displaying "demanding" behaviors such as pawing, jumping up, barking or mouthing.

When biting begins during play, or if you can anticipate biting, try to change her focus to a toy or some other form of play that does not involve biting. Another option is to use a training command, such as "sit" or "down," and reward them with a treat or toy if they settle down. A loud "ouch" when your dog bites can also be used to interrupt the behavior and mark the stopping of play. Play should begin again only if the biting does not recur.

There will likely be times when your puppy becomes overly aroused and you cannot effectively deal with the problem. In these situations, one option is to immediately leave the room and shut the door (as long as it's safe to leave your puppy alone) and return only when the puppy is settled. Otherwise take them to their safe area (such as a crate or pen) and give them a feeding or chew toy to keep them occupied.

**Avoid harsh corrections and physical punishment.** Never hit or slap your pet, shake by the scruff of the neck, roll them onto their back, or force your fingers in their mouths. This kind of correction is likely to make the biting problem worse, ruin the bond with your pet, and lead to more serious problems such as fear and aggression. On the other hand, some puppies may actually find these harsh corrections playful, and encourage them to bite and play more roughly.



## **Channel Their Energy**

If your puppy is constantly demanding attention by mouthing or biting or is playing too rough, then you will need to provide other ways to keep their brain and body active. Schedule regular play and exercise throughout the day in ways that do not involve mouthing, such as walking and running, playing fetch, chasing a ball, practicing training exercises, or playing tug games (as long as your pup's teeth stay on the toy, and not on your hands).

Another way to channel your puppy's energy is to provide frequent opportunities for playing with other friendly dogs. Giving your puppy dental treats, toys that are designed to be manipulated to release a treat, or those that promote prolonged chewing also provide opportunities to use their mouth and teeth in an acceptable and healthy way. The more energy the pup uses for those other activities, the less she will use for mouthy biting behavior. Remember the training mantra, "a tired puppy is a good puppy."

## **Communicating with Your Puppy**

Enroll your pet in puppy socialization and training classes as soon as possible. Teach them a few simple commands so you can communicate with them when she begins to engage in undesirable behaviors. Training sessions combine social time, mental stimulation, and learning new skills, while keeping your puppy focused on behaviors other than play biting.

Teach your puppy what behaviors you expect of them before they get any rewards. For example, ask them to sit before giving them things they want, and occasionally command her to stay for a second or two before following you around the home or going through a doorway. Be consistent.

## **Using a "Stop" Command**

If biting begins during play, it is important that the pet learn to stop on command. This can be done by giving an "enough" command when they are biting. Begin training when they are very calm. Hand the puppy a small piece of dry food as you say "okay" in a relaxed tone. Next, hold another piece of food in front of them and firmly say "enough" without raising your voice or yelling. If the puppy doesn't attempt to make contact with your hand or the food for two seconds, say "okay" and give them the food. If they touch your hand before two seconds pass and before you say "okay," immediately say "enough" with sufficient force to make them back away but not frighten them. Be dramatic, lean toward the pup, and make eye contact when you give the instruction "enough." Gradually increase the time the pup has to wait. Once they learn to leave the food along on command, practice the exercise without food by using only your hand. Later, repeat the exercise when the pup is more riled up.

The goal is to get to the point that the puppy will not take food or touch your hand once you have said "enough," no matter how tasty the treat or how interesting your hand. For this technique to work, the whole family must be very consistent, have precise timing, and practice every day. If necessary, a leash and head halter can also be used to teach the "enough" command. Whenever the puppy ignores the command to stop biting, a gentle pull on the leash will close their mouth. Eventually, the pup will stop biting when you give the command.

Reference: AAHA