



Dog Nipping

Most puppies are constant biting machines. Puppies often nip or mouth the clothes and body parts of people and other animals as a part of their play. Puppy biting, although at times quite annoying and sometimes painful, is, in fact, a normal and essential part of their behavioral development. Puppies, just like babies, are actively teething and interacting with their new surroundings and pack members and they do this by investigating with their mouths. Although puppy mouthing is normal and natural, and isn't usually intended to do harm, it can tear clothes and result in cuts and bruises on bare skin.

Teach acceptable behavior. Rather than just focusing on the bad behavior, ask yourself "What would I rather have my puppy do?" and then think about how you can get her to do it. If your puppy is nipping or mouthing people when they pet her, try giving her a tasty treat or a chew toy to occupy her while you pet her or teach her to sit quietly for a tidbit when you try to pet or greet her. This technique can be especially effective when children want to pet her. As you or the child reaches out to scratch her behind the ears with one hand, offer the treat or chew toy with the other. This will not only help your puppy learn that people and petting are wonderful, but will also keep her mouth busy while she's being petted. You should alternate which hand does the petting and which one has the treat/chew toy. You may need to start off by petting or scratching your puppy for short periods of time, since the longer she's petted, the more likely she is to get excited and start to nip.

Make sure your puppy gets lots of exercise and playtime. Puppies need to run. Find a safe environment (i.e. fenced-in yard) and allow her to run around and investigate. Teach your puppy games that you like and want to encourage (i.e. fetch, catch, hide and seek, find it, and Frisbee). It is important to make sure that you teach your puppy to release her toy when you ask for it. A firm command, such as "Release" or "Drop it!" works well to make sure you don't have a problem or confrontation when you want the toy back. Roughhousing with your hands should be completely avoided. This teaches grabbing, biting, and causes your puppy to be very "mouthy." Any game that brings out these types of behaviors (i.e. tug of war) should be completely avoided, especially with children.

Discourage unacceptable/inappropriate behavior. Never encourage your puppy to grab you or your clothes. If she does grab or nip you or your clothes, cross your arms and look away from her or walk away from her so she learns that nipping means she won't receive any attention from you. Don't laugh, look at her, or give in to her play as this rewards the behavior. If your puppy is worse when children are playing, try to keep her separated from the play or put her on a leash so her behavior can be controlled. Never let children tease or excite puppies into nipping and mouthy play.

Use punishment correctly. If these strategies don't work, try yelling "Ouch!" whenever the puppy tries to mouth or nip you. This action imitates that of the puppy's littermates if it were bitten to hard. For some puppies this will startle them and inhibit their biting. There are a few puppies for which the yelling does not inhibit them, it actually increases the biting. If this seems to make the nipping and mouthing worse, stop doing it. You may need to try other ways to punish the biting behavior. If you need to, leave the room and ignore her until she is calm and then try the chew toy and petting method again. Try a time out, a spray from a water bottle, or a squirt of Bitter Apple in the mouth (harmless to the dog - it just tastes really bad to her). To make any punishment work whether yelling "Ouch!", giving her a time out, or a spray of water or bitter apple, you must use them as soon as the puppy starts nipping and you must use them consistently. Pet her quietly or give her a chew toy when she does stop the nipping to reward the calm, relaxed behavior. Don't punish her by hitting, slapping, kicking or other physical means. This sort of punishment can cause fear or aggression or even make the problem worse.

Remember, patience, persistence, and consistency are the keys to successfully training your dog to stop nipping. If you have tried the methods above and are still experiencing difficulties with your pet you may want to seek the help of a professional trainer.

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