



## Biting Puppies

Puppies are inquisitive creatures that are on a rapid and amazing journey of discovery as they explore the world that is opening up around them. Only a few weeks ago their eyes opened for the first time, and it's only a couple of weeks since they have known anything other than their mother and their litter mates.



Without hands, their mouth is the easiest way to explore things. So puppies naturally check things out with their mouths. Lick it. Is it something I can eat? Mouth it. Does it feel good on my gums? Chew it. BITE IT! Do I get a fun reaction from my people?

In puppies, biting is not generally a show of aggression.

Add to all this excitement and exploration, puppies are “teething” almost constantly from 3 weeks to 7 months of age. Puppy (deciduous) teeth erupt from 3 weeks to around 12 weeks of age. Many puppies start losing their deciduous teeth at 3 months of age and this can continue to around 7 months of age. Based on human children this can cause odd sensations and at times significant

discomfort. It seems that chewing certain things during this period can provide some relief.

We certainly don't want to stop puppies chewing on things.... we just want them to learn not to chew or bite people. This is generally referred to as “Bite Inhibition”

### Bite Inhibition.

Dogs naturally learn a certain amount of “Bite Inhibition” from socializing with their litter. If you have ever watched puppies play ... it frequently gets rough! At some point one of the pups will latch onto another pup's ear and a yelp will be heard. Usually at this point the yelper will stop playing and the ruffian will stop as well. If not and the ruffian keeps going ... the yelper will walk away and separate from the rough pup. With time the pups learn to moderate their biting and mouthing so that the game doesn't get interrupted. Like with many effective training techniques all we have to do is tap into and amplify this normal behaviour. We need our puppies to understand that our soft human skin is very sensitive and that they need to be very gentle with us.

My Labrador and English Staffies are able to crush bones and break sticks in their mouths, but in 20 years, once they learnt bite inhibition, none of them have broken the skin on me or any of my children.

## Teaching Bite Inhibition

Bite inhibition training is very simple. You just have to behave like a bitten puppy.



The key to success is **consistency**....

1. When playing with your puppy have some toys handy... if he or she starts to mouth you try to redirect the chewing and biting onto the toy. Rope bones are fantastic here. There should always be a toy between their mouth and your skin.
2. When playing, establish consistent rules of play. If your puppy starts to get too rough and mouthy, stop play and allow them to calm down before continuing.
3. If your puppy does nip you, let out a high pitched 'OUCH!' and stop play.
  - Let your hand go limp. It is important to be still.
  - Stand up and turn your back, for 10- 20 seconds. Just long enough for things to calm down
  - Walk away if necessary

This is similar to what their littermates and other dogs will do when getting hurt during play. It teaches them the boundaries of play. Once he/she has stopped, reward with a treat or a toy. Or just calmly resume the play.

4. If your puppy is too excited to respond to your "OUCH" and keeps on with the

rough behaviour even as you are trying to ignore him/her, you may need a time out. Social withdrawal can be a powerful training aid. You may need to leave the room and shut the door. Wait 30 seconds or a minute before re-entering the room. Only re-enter the room when the puppy is quiet. Do not re-engage in play for a few minutes.

Consistency of everyone involved with the puppy is vital. It is really difficult for a puppy to learn what acceptable behaviour is if sometimes they are allowed to play rough and other times the same play gets them into trouble!

There some "training" techniques that we do not recommend because they are ineffective or even counter productive.

Try to avoid:

- Pulling your hand away when the puppy is biting... it can be misinterpreted as part of the game and can also end up doing more damage to your hand. It is better to let your hand go limp.
- Pushing your puppy away or holding it down...this can be seen as a game resulting in more of the behaviour.
- Chase my hand games. You should always have a toy between you and your pup's mouth in games.
- Rough, teasing or taunting games, especially those that involve putting your hand near the puppy's face, games that may be interpreted by your pup as goading him/her to bite your hand.
- Squealing and hysterics, this can often be confused as just a rough game and so escalate the behaviour.
- Shouting or attempting to physically dominate the puppy - they may learn

from you and start to copy your behaviour

- Any form of punishment - smacking or forcefully holding the mouth close - pain may cause the puppy to become increasingly agitated, nervous and fearful or perhaps more excited.

### **Ankle Biters!**

A very similar problem! If your puppy is biting you ankles or clothes when you walk, remember it is most likely an attempt to get you to play.



1. Always have a toy around, preferably in your pocket.
2. At the first hint of an attack on your ankles, stop moving your feet.
3. Just wait until your puppy stops the inappropriate behaviour.
  - If waiting fails distract your puppy with the toy.
4. Immediately praise the good behaviour and reward with a toy.
5. Repeat this process consistently every time your puppy attacks when you walk until they get used to you moving around without play attacking.

During training of ankle biters it is important to wear enclosed shoes and strong pants (eg jeans) as they provide protection from those sharp teeth.