



Puppy Biting

If you have ever seen *The Lion King*, you most likely remember Mufasa showing Simba Pride Rock and telling him that everything the light touches is our kingdom. This is exactly how puppies view their worlds: if I can see it, it belongs in my mouth. Your new puppy is just like a 2-year-old and they will mouth everything including you! Dogs explore new things by mouthing and when a puppy is first brought home that behavior usually doesn't bother most people. Later, puppies get those razor-sharp teeth and it's not so cute anymore.

Dogs and puppies will bite or mouth you for several reasons. The puppies could be teething and gnawing on fingers relieves the pain they are feeling. It can also be a form of play and exploration. Mouthing is how dogs learn about this whole new world they are now a part of. They will put things in their mouths to investigate: "Hmm what's that? Let me put it in my mouth!" Your finger sure looks like a fun chew toy and it feels great to bite down on it. Dogs while playing with each other will also do a lot of mouthing techniques. Big, open wide mouths show us teeth aren't being used so it is still considered fun.

The moment your dog starts mouthing, you need to understand what your dog is looking to get from this interaction, so you'll know how to respond accordingly. In order to do this, you will have to become a pet detective. What does your dog want? Why are they doing this behavior? For example. If the dog is biting or mouthing because they are teething, having acceptable chews/toys ready and available can help prevent your dog from learning hands are part of the game. It is never a good idea to start playing hand games with your puppies as this will reinforce the biting behavior. When they do go for your hands you could redirect their attention and offer items such as ice cubes, frozen or wet rope toys and frozen KONGs. These frozen toys can help numb the gums and ease the discomfort associated with teething. This will also encourage mouthing and chewing appropriate objects.

It's important you teach your dog about bite inhibition. Bite inhibition is when a dog learns what is too hard of a bite and when it is no longer considered play. Puppies who learn bite inhibition are less likely to grow into adults that bite. Puppies will naturally nip but if they have learned bite inhibition, however they understand not to bite down hard. If a puppy bites too hard, quietly walk away or redirect them to an appropriate chew item. You could also gently place the puppy in their crate for a few minutes, with an appropriate chew, to give them time to calm down. This is not for punishment! It is simply to allow them time to decompress and interrupt the inappropriate nipping. You need to decide if light mouthing or biting is okay. If not, when your puppy starts biting while being petted, you should stop petting them immediately get up and walk away. Game over. No teeth allowed.

Before interactions with your dog can happen, you need to be set up for success. Using crates, baby gates and play pens will keep your dog in a specific area and away from you until you're ready to engage with them. Having a toy in hand as you approach your dog will be a great redirection tool to prevent teeth from contacting skin. In addition, having long toys/tugs (long toys help keep hands away from the pup's mouth, helping to discourage any nipping). readily available in different areas of the house will



ensure no matter where you are when the dog starts to bite, you have an alternative solution. You can also carry a rope toy in a pocket if the puppy is trying to attack moving pants or feet. While walking, you can bring the toy out of your pocket and redirect the dog's attention by holding it next to your leg. This can help the puppies learn to walk nicely alongside you. You can also try to play "Find It." Toss kibble or treats around the floor away from and have the dogs search for them.

If your dog is ignoring redirection tactics or the toys they are being offered, remember to stay calm. Try not to get frustrated and do not punish your dog. Any attention, even negative attention, may be rewarding to your dog, especially if this is an attention seeking behavior. Some dogs might even get more excited because of the yelling and think the you're joining in on the fun while others might become fearful and associate the yelling with handling or socialization with people. It's best your dog learns that biting gets them nothing. Always be encouraging and reward quiet, calm behaviors as your dog will be more likely to engage in those specific behaviors if they have been praised and rewarded for doing so in the past.

If your dog is looking for attention learn to ignore them. Before ignoring attention seeking behavior, make sure you dog's needs are met. If you puppy needs to get outside to go potty, ignoring would not be a great choice. If your dog is trying to get you play at an inopportune time, ignoring would be an appropriate response. Start by looking away, fold your arms and tuck hands into armpits, stand up if you were sitting and if it's needed, walk away from the dog completely.

If the biting continues after several trials of redirecting attention onto toys, consider offering your dog some physical and mental stimulation. This will give your dog a chance to burn off some of that pent-up energy and frustration that may be contributing to the biting behavior.

Prevention, management and redirection is our formula for a happy healthy partnership with your furry friend. Do not allow your puppy to practice the biting behavior. Give them safe alternatives and use environmental management while teaching them appropriate interaction.