

Information sheet - Puppy Mouthing

Help, my little puppy is 'biting' me and the family members all the time!!!! What can I do?

This is a question that we hear all the time.

While Mouthing (Often called 'puppy biting')) is a normal canine behaviour, it is unacceptable to us humans.

Mouthing/puppy biting is used by young dogs to explore new things and is used in interactions with other dogs and humans. It can be worse when this coincides with the time of teething, where puppies feel an even greater need to chew on things to relieve the discomfort.

Often mouthing/puppy biting is somewhat tolerated when pups are little and the behaviour is excused with the puppy's age. The reality is though, that unfortunately your dog will not 'grow out of it' and by the time the dog is a little bigger and stronger, the mouthing is quite painful and often perceived as a real 'bite'.



The best is to be pro-active and set up a 'no teeth on skin' policy right from the start. When your puppy is starting to mouth your hands or feet, be sure to have a soft toy (or a soft tug toy) within reach so that you can redirect them to something appropriate to put their teeth on instead. The more appropriate items you provide that your puppy CAN chew, the lesser chance that they will mouth your hands instead.

Often mouthing/puppy biting will occur when the puppy is being handled. This could either be due to a heightened state of arousal or the puppy not being totally comfortable with being handled yet.

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- If your puppy is too excited when being touched, start at a time where your puppy is calm. Try long and slow, very gentle strokes – just for a few seconds then stop. Gradually increase the duration (few seconds at the time) until you can stroke all parts of the body. Have a soft toy or a food toy (such as a stuffed Kong) ready. If they start to mouth during any of this process redirect towards a toy, if that is unsuccessful, use a short time out (see below).
- If the puppy is concerned about being handled, proceed as above, but start with 1 second! Pair the touching with one hand and treat from the other hand. Ensure that the puppy can move away at any time ie don't hold the puppy on your lap, as this prevents her from getting away when it gets too hard. Read the subtle signals of body language closely (for more information refer to our 'Dog Body Language' info sheet).

To set your puppy up for success:

- Try to limit the interactions with your puppy when she is boisterous and over excited.
- Try holding the end of a chew (such as a pig's ear or rawhide stick) and allow your puppy to chew on it, whilst you are gently stroking her.
- Encourage all family members to practice handling your puppy as described above.



How to use time-out:

If you are unable to redirect your puppy to a toy, the next step is to provide an immediate time out whenever contact between puppy teeth and human skin is made, no matter how accidental.

- Remove your puppy and give her a short time out: 30 seconds is enough.
- It is important with time-out that the puppy has an opportunity to 'try again' – this is a crucial step in learning what is right.
- Be prepared to do repeated time-outs until they understand that the consequence of mouthing is stop of play and brief social isolation.

But it seems to get worse.....

Be aware, that if your puppy has practiced this behaviour for a while and you suddenly change your approach, you will much likely see a temporary increase in the behaviour (extinction burst). This is expected!!! Don't give up and be persistent - you are on the right track!

Remember

If you scream, yell, squeal, push them away or say No – it might not only heighten your puppy's arousal, it also doesn't teach her what you want her to do instead!