

Mouthing and Puppy Biting

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Puppies, like human babies, use their mouths for almost everything. For eating, for playing, for exploring and learning about the world. Most mouthing behavior is excitement and play based and is what this guide is directed towards. Nipping and mouthing are more common in puppies that were taken from their mother and littermates before 10-12 weeks (when they would naturally learn bite inhibition from their mom and siblings). Puppies that are tired and overstimulated also bite more and bite harder. Make sure your puppy gets an adequate amount of restful sleep, usually 18+ hours for a young puppy with that gradually lessening as the dog gets into adolescence and maturity.

For play biting, it's important that you become a statue and disengage with the puppy. Stand up if you have to. No movement, no sound, don't even look at the puppy. Any movement or noise (even "ouch!") just adds more stimuli to an already overstimulated and over excited puppy. Wait the puppy out. Then, when the puppy offers any other acceptable behavior, reward the puppy with attention and play time. It's important to understand that puppies are puppies. It is natural for them to put things in their mouth. It is natural for them to play by biting. They have short attention spans and short memories and they react more easily and quickly to emotional impulses and biological drives. An adult dog that was never taught how to play appropriately with people has all of these things and also a bad habit to undo. This means the puppy/dog will fail. A lot. You will reach to reward her and she will immediately think it's play time and start biting again. You have to go back to being a statue. And you have to stick with it! Eventually, with enough repetitions, the puppy will learn that biting gets her no attention and the fun ends, but other good behaviors like being calm or giving eye contact or waiting politely or sitting will get her fun play time and a lot of praise. So she'll choose the behavior path that gets her what she's looking for. If you use a toy and a game of tug as her reward, and especially if you predict and preempt the mouthing with that game, often the puppy

will learn to look for a toy to grab and bring you when they are excited and will default to that instead of trying to play with your arm. They still have the drive to put something in their mouth and play by using their mouth after all!

Dogs that are not taught bite inhibition and oral impulse control as young puppies in a positive way often become mouthy adolescents and adults. The training process is the same regardless of age, but once mouthing becomes a learned habit rather than a puppy impulse, it can take longer to extinguish.