

Biting and Nipping

Biting is a normal behaviour for puppies. This is one way puppies play with each other to organize the hierarchy of the social group. So when you and your puppy begin your relationship, your puppy must be taught that your skin is much more sensitive than his. **Play biting you is not an acceptable behaviour!**

Old techniques to stop this behaviour, such as grabbing your puppy's muzzle, giving your puppy a shake and saying "No," or pinning your puppy down, can only make matters worse! These types of reprimands can be interpreted by your puppy as an act of aggression. In many cases, reprimands such as these can even escalate the problem. Correction should not be handled with any methods the puppy could misinterpret. When hurtful methods are used to stop this behaviour, play biting can quickly escalate to aggressive biting.

You will want to send a clear message to your puppy that biting you or other humans is not an acceptable behaviour. You can accomplish this by *withdrawing all attention from him when he bites you*. **Attention, whether positive or negative, is still attention.** With that in mind, even scolding the puppy is a reward because he got your attention.

When he starts to bite, walk away. If your puppy is biting your shoe or pant leg, you may find it a little harder to walk away from him. When he grabs your pants or shoes, take him into a small area, such as your bathroom or another small room in the house. Re-create the behaviour that caused him to bite you. When he begins to bite, do not say a word—just walk out of the room and close the door quickly. Be careful not to close the door on your puppy's nose or paws; you will not want to hurt him when doing this. Leave him isolated in the room for a few seconds. Go back into the room and act as if nothing ever happened. Begin to re-create the behaviour that caused him to bite again. When he tries to bite at your shoes or clothes, quickly walk out of the room again and close the door. After repeating this a few times a day over several days, the puppy will realize that every time he grabs your clothing or shoes or bites you, he will be left all alone. Through isolation and being ignored, the inappropriate biting behaviour will stop.

It can sometimes get confusing to you and your puppy when playing together. Was the bite on purpose or was it an accident? To be safe, *always assume it was on purpose*. Stop the play and walk away from your puppy. Most bites are on purpose, so continuing the play will only confuse your puppy.

Try not to offer reasons for the biting behaviour. Words such as "My puppy did not mean it," "It was an accident," and "It was really my fault, not my puppy's" can cause more harm than good. Trying to be understanding and helpful by offering reasons why the behaviour happened can only make matters worse and confuse your puppy. Your puppy may think biting is a wonderful game. If that happens, the biting behaviour will increase in intensity as you continue to allow and reinforce it. The more demanding your puppy is with this wonderful game, the harder he may begin to bite. Before you know it, the

biting will escalate, and the puppy will think it is part of the game and biting you is an acceptable behaviour.

Another thing you can do is put your puppy in the crate for a time-out. Wait for him to settle down and then open the crate slowly to let him out. If he tries to bite at you again, simply close the crate door and leave him in the crate for a little longer. Then wait for him to settle down and try to open the crate again. You may have to repeat this exercise many times a day over a few days for your puppy to understand. When putting your puppy in the crate or into his space for a time-out, *do not drag him by the collar*. When he is dragged by the collar, he may become afraid of your hands reaching for him. This technique could result in your puppy being afraid of hands and cause him to shy away from you when you try to reach out to pet him. Instead, either pick your puppy up, if you can do so without getting hurt, or have a short, two-foot leash attached to his collar. This way, when he bites you, you can use the leash to bring him to his crate and lead him. *Remember, do not open the crate for a barking dog*. When you do, you are teaching your puppy that you can be trained. Many puppies are capable of barking for a very long time. This is how they wear down their owners. But you must use tough love here if you want him to learn quickly. When the puppy carries on for 30 minutes, it is tempting to let him out for a little quiet in the house, but do not let him out. If you do, the puppy will only bark longer next time and matters will get worse, not better. *Always wait for that moment of silence* before opening the crate for a barking dog.

Hugging, kissing, and holding your puppy is a human need, not a puppy's. Many puppies do not like to be held quite as long or as often as many puppy parents might think they do. You should not expect acceptance of hugs and kisses from your puppy. Your puppy needs time to understand you and your ways. Many puppies will allow the hugs and kisses once they are comfortable with their new family. Since he is constantly learning, he will figure out that kissing, holding, and hugging will not harm him, especially if you *listen to his request to stop or be let down* when he asks. By giving him the time he needs to get used to some of our human idiosyncrasies, he will become comfortable with this human hugging and kissing thing. After all, how comfortable would you be if someone walked up to you and smelled your butt? That is a natural behaviour for dogs, just like hugging and kissing is for us.

Puppies can interpret being held as being confined, which is something they do not like. To ask you to let them down, some puppies will start off licking your arm or hand—that is their way of politely asking to be let down. When the request is missed by you, the only option your puppy has to let you know he wants to get down is to start biting at your hand, arms, or clothing. By paying attention to your puppy's signals, you can avoid this situation. If, after trying these methods, your puppy is still biting, please call our practice. There may be a physical or emotional problem going on that should be addressed immediately.

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If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us