Puppy Nipping

When puppies play with each other, they use their mouths. Therefore, puppies usually want to bite or "mouth" hands during play or when being petted. This behavior is rarely aggressive and, therefore, not intended to cause harm. Because puppies are highly motivated to exhibit this type of behavior, attempts to suppress it or stop it are unlikely to be successful unless you give your puppy an alternative behavior.

The goals of working with this normal puppy behavior are to redirect your puppy's desire to put something in her mouth, such as an acceptable chew toy, and to teach her that putting her teeth on skin is never acceptable.

Encourage Acceptable Behavior

Redirect your puppy's chewing toward acceptable objects by offering her a small rawhide chew bone or other type of chew toy whenever you pet her. This technique can be especially effective when children want to pet her. As you or the child reach out to scratch her with one hand, offer the chew bone with the other. This will not only help your puppy learn that people and petting are wonderful, but will also keep her mouth busy while she's being petted. Alternate which hand does the petting and which one has the chew bone. At first, you may need to pet or scratch your puppy for short periods of time since the longer she's petted, the more likely she is to get excited and start to nip.

Discourage Unacceptable Behavior

You must also teach your puppy that putting her teeth on skin is unacceptable and that nipping results in unpleasant consequences for her. Teach your puppy that nipping "turns off" all attention and social interaction with you. As soon as you feel her teeth on your skin, yelp, "OUCH" in a high-pitched voice, then ignore her for a few minutes. In order to ignore her, you may need to leave the room, or alternatively, have her tethered by a leash while you play, so when you leave she can't follow.

> **Note**: Never leave your puppy unattended while she is tethered as she may get tangled in her leash and injure herself.

Then, try the chew toy and petting method again. It may take many repetitions for your puppy to understand what's expected.

You may also try wearing cotton gloves coated with a substance that has an unpleasant taste, such as Bitter Apple. Your puppy learns that "hands in mouth taste bad." For this method to work, she must experience this bad taste every time she nips your hand. The possible disadvantage to this method is that your puppy may learn that "hands with gloves taste bad and those without gloves don't."

Remember that these methods will not work unless you teach your puppy the right behavior by offering her an acceptable chew toy.

Jumping Up

When your puppy jumps up on you, she wants attention. When you push her away, knee her in the chest or step on her hind toes, she's getting your attention! This becomes a rewarding behavior and

therefore the puppy will continue to jump because even negative attention is attention. From the puppy's point of view, negative attention is better than no attention at all.

When your puppy jumps up:

- Fold your arms in front of you, turn away from her and say, "off."
- Continue to turn away from her until all four of her feet are on the ground, then quietly praise her and give her a treat. If she knows the "sit" command, give the command when all four feet are on the ground, then quietly praise her and give her a treat her while she's in the sitting position.
- If she jumps up again when you begin to praise her, simply turn away and repeat step two, above. Remember to keep your praise low key.
- Try to have every person she meets follow these same steps.

When your puppy realizes that she gets the attention she craves when she stops jumping on you and sits, she'll stop jumping up. Remember, once you've taught her to come and sit quietly for attention, you must reward that behavior. Be careful not to ignore her when she comes and sits politely, waiting for your attention.

What Not To Do

Never tap, slap or hit your puppy in the face for nipping or jumping up. These methods are guaranteed to backfire. Depending on your puppy's temperament and the severity of the correction:

- She could become "hand shy" and cringe or cower whenever a hand comes toward her face.
- She could become afraid of you and refuse to come to you or approach you at all.
- She could respond in a defensive manner and attempt to bite you to defend herself.
- She could interpret a mild slap as an invitation to play, causing her to become more excited and even more likely to nip.

A Note about Children And Puppies

It's very difficult for children under 8 or 9 years old to practice the kind of behavior modification outlined here. Children's first reaction to being nipped or mouthed by a puppy is to push the puppy away with their hands and arms. This will be interpreted by the puppy as play and will probably cause the puppy to nip and mouth even more. Dogs should never be left alone with children under 10 years old and parents should monitor closely all interactions between their children and dogs.

©2003 Dumb Friends League. All Rights Reserved.

Thanks to our friends at the
Dumb Friends League of Denver
for the use of these informative tips.