



# Puppy Nipping

When puppies play with each other they primarily use their mouths. Because of this, puppies usually want to bite or “mouth” hands during play or when being petted. This behavior is rarely intended to cause harm, but it is usually not a behavior we want to continue into adulthood. Puppy nipping or mouthing is completely normal and we don’t want to stop it, but instead, give the puppy appropriate outlets for the behavior.

## **Encourage Acceptable Behavior**

Redirect your puppy’s chewing toward acceptable objects by offering her another type of chew toy whenever she mouths on you or another unacceptable object. You can even start by offering the chew before the mouthing starts, especially when you want to 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 stops 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 seconds. In order to ignore her, you may need to leave the room or turn your back to her. If you find that the high-pitched yelp actually makes your pup more excited, just stay quiet and stop the interaction.

After you’ve paused play time for a few seconds, try the chew toy and petting method again. It may take many repetitions for your puppy to understand what’s expected. If your pup isn’t interested in the chew toy, try something else. You may want to try a variety of different materials, shapes, textures, etc. If you need to, you can also spread a bit of peanut butter or something similar on the toy to encourage the pup to chew on it.

Remember that these methods will not work unless you teach your puppy what you want her to do instead by offering her an acceptable chew toy.

## Jumping Up

When your puppy jumps up on you, she wants attention. When you push her away, kneel 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 and turn away from her.
- Continue to turn away from her, even take a step away from her, and wait until all four of her feet are on the ground. Then quietly praise her and give her a treat. If she knows "sit," give the cue when all four feet are on the ground, then quietly praise her and give her a treat while she's in the sitting position.
- If she jumps up again when you begin to praise her, simply turn away and repeat the steps above. Remember to keep your praise low key, but still use a happy tone of voice.
- Try to have every person she meets follow these same steps.
- If you can anticipate that she's about to jump on you, try to catch her before she's able to jump and either give her attention while all four feet are on the floor, or quickly ask for a "sit" and then reward.

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. 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.

## Children and Puppies

It's very difficult for younger children 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 or to make a noise and run. 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 unsupervised and parents should monitor all interactions between their children and dogs closely.