



PUPPY BITING

By: Patricia Calderone, CPDT-KA

Teaching your pup bite inhibition is critical because as your pup moves into adulthood and its bite strength increases, the dog will know to stop immediately if its teeth come into contact with your skin before potentially doing harm. All puppies need to learn bite inhibition, which means that your dog learns to control the amount of force it exerts with its jaws. Dogs are not born with a soft bite instinct; it is learned through interaction with their litter mates. As the puppies interact with each other, they learn not to bite too hard, or their littermates will stop playing with them. In some cases, puppies born as a singleton pup, or removed from their litter too soon never learn to control the strength of their bite.

As surprising as it may sound, you should let your puppy bite on your fingers when trying to teach this behavior. Words such as “Ouch,” “No Bite,” or mimicking the sound of a puppy yelping should be used when the puppy bites down too hard in order to get the puppy to associate biting hard with their owner’s displeasure. Puppies will typically bite most often during playtime, which presents the best opportunity to begin teaching the pup to have a “soft mouth”. When the pup bites too hard, say “Ouch,” “No Bite,” or mimic a yelp, and do it in a manner which shows displeasure with the behavior. Failure to make it clear that you are unhappy with the puppy’s actions may be interpreted that your vocalization is just a part of normal playtime, triggering more excitement in the puppy. After giving your vocal cue, you need to leave the area in which you were playing with the puppy. Staying in the room or down on the floor with the pup will make the puppy continue to think it is still playtime. By leaving the area, you are sending the message that “biting me ends the fun”. Ensure that the puppy cannot follow you by using a leash, or closing the door. After a few seconds (about 30 seconds), return and resume playing with your puppy, repeating the above routine every time the puppy bites too hard.



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Initially, you only want to give feedback when the puppy bites hard. As time goes by increase the amount of feedback given with each bite, no matter the severity, to get your puppy to realize that any bite is unacceptable. By approximately 4 ½ to 5 months, your puppy should be at the point where it knows not to put their teeth on your skin at all, unless invited. Hand feeding your puppy can help teach and reinforce the behaviors being sought. If the puppy's teeth touch your skin while feeding, withdraw your hand and the food for a moment, and then try again. As your dog matures into adulthood, continue reinforcing this behavior by playing tug'o'war with your dog, stopping if its teeth touch your skin.

Don't use your children to help teach bite inhibition. Children's natural inclination to be active, noisy, and excitable in general can cause your puppy to act in the same way. Combining an excited child and an excited puppy will only make an accident more likely. Always make sure interaction between your puppy and small children is supervised, regardless of how well the puppy has learned bite inhibition.

Clicker Canines can teach your puppy bite inhibition. Please check out our *Puppy Starter Course*, a 4-week long course to help get your puppy off to a great start!

Call Patricia, 708-557-4913 for more information.

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