

PUPPY MOUTHINESS

- 1. Ignore
- 2. Replace
- 3. Time out
- 4. Exercise

Many puppies use their mouths inappropriately when they play. They bite, grab, and wrestle with their siblings and their toys. While this is a normal canine behavior, when they are old enough to leave the litter and move in with a new human family, it is important for them to learn that they cannot bite us like they used to bite their littermates.

There are several tactics for addressing puppy mouthiness. Sometimes, a combination of techniques will work best for your particular puppy. Remember to never use force, pain, or intimidation to try to get your puppy to stop mouthing. If you resort to using force-based tactics (like yelling or pushing your hand into the puppy’s mouth or spraying them with water) you can create a bigger problem. Your puppy might respond with more forceful biting and what was once a problem of overexcitement can become one of actual aggression. Remember - as frustrating as it can be, you’re dealing with a baby who is learning how the world works. Take a deep breath, and try to be patient and kind!

Ignore

Think about your reaction when your puppy starts biting you. Do you yelp? Do you get mad? Cry, run away, push them off of you? From your puppy’s perspective, this is a really fun game! Bite human, human makes noise. Dogs love getting a rise out of us. Why don’t dogs run up to trees and bite them like they bite us? Probably because biting tree trunks is boring. The tree doesn’t run, move, scream, etc. Even getting eye contact from a human can be reinforcing enough for an attention-seeking behavior like mouthiness to continue. Try your best to be a tree and not react to your puppy’s biting. When puppy teeth touch human skin, step away, stand still, and do not engage.

Management/replacement

Always have a toy ready to place in to your puppy’s mouth. If there is a toy in their mouth, they won’t be able to seek out your arms/hands/other body parts for play-biting. When you see them start to go for your body with their mouth, out comes the



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toy as a replacement—THEN engage with them. No toy, no play time. We can even reward them for picking up a toy on their own by beginning a play session when they do. In this way, we can begin to train your dog to automatically go find and pick up a toy whenever they are feeling playful or excited. When your puppy is excited, they are going to want to bite something - give them a toy instead of your body!

Timeouts

When you're in the throes of puppy mouthiness, it can be really hard to ignore biting! Maybe you weren't fast enough with your toy or the puppy is very persistent and continues to mouth you even if you ignore them. There are couple of reasons why it's hard to simply ignore biting.

1. It hurts. Even if you can grin and bare the adorable baby chewing on your hand, your children or elderly neighbors can't.
2. Some behaviors are self-reinforcing. Even if we don't react or reinforce the behavior, it might still be fun to chew on humans. We might taste good. We're a little bit chewy. The best.

Therefore, timeouts can be a great tool to teach your puppy that when they get mouthy, playtime is over. For the next few weeks, commit to being very consistent with your feedback to your puppy. Let your puppy drag a 6 foot leash around the house. Keep it clipped in to their collar when they come inside or get a smaller, lighter weight leash for this purpose. As soon as teeth touch skin, calmly pick up their leash and walk them in to a puppy proof room. They should remain there for 45-60 seconds. Many short time outs are a lot more effective than 1 or 2 long time outs. For example, five 1 minute time outs are much more effective in conveying your message than one 5 minute time out. After about a minute, your puppy won't remember why they're in the bathroom.

When they get mouthy again, whether it happens an hour after time out or 30 seconds, they go right back in for another short time out. As long as you're consistent with this, and use the time out as soon as they get mouthy, they will learn that play time ends with the teeth come out.

Time out locations

Don't use their crate as a timeout spot. You want your dog to love being in their crate—which means the crate shouldn't be used for social isolation. Use a bathroom or bedroom where the puppy will be really bored for those 45 seconds. Make sure toilet paper, shoes, pillows and the like are picked up before they go in. We don't want puppy to think timeout=shredding toilet paper time. Don't have a puppy proof room? Try these ideas. Close the leash in the door so that they only have a 3-4 foot radius on the other side of the door (limited space means limited fun activities). Set a gate up in the kitchen or other room if you don't have a door there, so that you can step over the gate for a time out.

Consistency

A really important rule to remember with any of these practices is consistency. If it's not OK for them to play rough with certain people, they shouldn't be allowed to be mouthy with anyone they interact with.

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If they get to bite and roughhouse with some people and not others, they're going to keep trying to play roughly with everyone who comes in the house. Remember that with children in the house, you should be actively supervising any interactions with the puppy so that you can ensure that everyone is following the training plan consistently.

Exercise

Finally, remember that a tired puppy is a good puppy! Sometimes mouthiness can be reduced simply by increasing the puppy's exercise. Make sure the puppy is getting walks to sniff and explore, in addition to basic training, and maybe even some work to eat toys (the Kong Wobbler is a great starter toy for puppies!). Remember, set your puppy up for success, be consistent with your feedback, and don't despair! You will get there! Puppies don't simply "grow out" of mouthiness, so training is essential, but things will get easier as they get older and more mature (as long as you've been following the training plan!)

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2. Replace

Always have a toy ready to place in to your puppy's mouth. If there is a toy in their mouth, they won't be able to seek out your arms/hands/other body parts for play-biting.

3. Time out

Don't use their crate as a timeout spot. Instead, try limiting their space for fun activities or setting up a gate in a kitchen or other room so that they have a place for time out.

4. Exercise

A tired puppy is a good puppy!



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