



## Dealing With Puppy Mouthing, Nipping, and Rough Play

Courtesy of the Dumb Friends League

When Puppies play with each other they use their mouths. Therefore, puppies usually want to bite or “mouth” human hands during play or when being petted. This behavior is rarely aggressive and not intended to cause harm. 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 and 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 reaches out to scratch her with one hand, offer the chew bone with the other. This will not only help the puppy learn that people and petting are wonderful, but will also keep her mouth busy while she is being petted. At first you may need to pet or scratch your puppy for short periods of time since the longer she is petted, the more likely she is to get excited and start to nip.

### Discourage Unacceptable Behavior

Teach your puppy that nipping and mouthing “turns off” ALL attention and social interaction with you. As soon as you feel her teeth on your skin, yelp, say “ouch!” in a high-pitched voice, and then ignore her for a few minutes. In order to ignore her you may need to leave the room or keep her tied with a leash so she can not follow you when you walk away. After a few minutes, try the chew toy and petting method again. It may take MANY repetitions for your puppy to understand what is expected of her.

- **\*\*NEVER** leave your puppy unattended while she is tethered. She may get tangled and hurt herself. **\*\***
- You may also try wearing cotton gloves coated in a substance with a substance that is made for dogs that has an unpleasant taste, such as Bitter Apple. Your puppy will learn that hands in the mouth taste bad. However, some puppies may learn that gloves taste bad, and not hands.
- **Remember** that these methods will be ineffective unless you work hard to teach your puppy the correct behavior by offering her a chew toy in place of your fingers.

## Jumping Up

When your puppy jumps up on you, she is demanding attention. When you push her away, bump her with your knee, or other methods of this sort, she is getting what she wants: Your Attention! The jumping becomes a rewarding behavior and your puppy will continue to do so because negative attention is still attention. In your puppy's mind, 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 keep your back to 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, and then praise her quietly and give her a treat while she remains sitting on the ground.
- If she jumps up when you begin to praise her, simply turn away and repeat the steps above. Remember to keep your praise low key and quiet.
- Try to have every person she meets follow these same steps.

## What Not to Do

Attempts to tap, slap, or hit your puppy in the face for nipping or jumping up are **guaranteed** to backfire. Several things may happen, depending on your puppy's temperament and the severity of the corrections:

- 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 more likely to nip.

## A Note about Children and Puppies

It is very difficult for children under 8 or 9 years old to practice the kind of behavior modification outlined here. A child's first reaction to being nipped or mouthed is going to be to push the puppy away with their hands or 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 of age and parents should closely monitor all interactions between children and their dogs.