



## **Puppy Biting.....**

*Written by Jennifer Craig of Harborview Golden*

### ***Is my puppy all of a sudden being aggressive??***

NO- The biting is a normal part of puppy behavior-the puppies unfortunately have to learn bite inhibition and most of it is learned on their littermates. But they must also learn it on humans or we would all be in big trouble as they got bigger. They have big teeth as adult dogs and obviously could seriously injure us, if they so choose-they chose not to because they learn bite inhibition and not to bite as a puppy. It is an unfortunate part of puppy hood because yes, the puppy teeth are sharp! When she is biting-it is really done in play like she would with her littermates. She has to learn how hard is too hard just like she had to with them. When she bit too hard with them, they would cry or whine or would bite back at her. Obviously, a couple of those things are out of the question to do back to the puppy, but things work best when we work with the dogs on a level that they can understand. Do an internet search and you will find TONS of quick fixes and claims to fix it and articles about it because it is easily the biggest problem in puppyhood!

Below is some information that I have written about puppies and biting. Hope you find it helpful when that wonderful ball of fluff all of a sudden seems to have jaws of steel!

### ***PUPPY BITING***

Puppies bite. And thank goodness they do! Puppy play-fighting and play-biting are essential for your puppy to develop a soft mouth as an adult.



## **Puppy Biting is Normal, Natural, and Necessary!**

Puppy biting seldom causes appreciable harm, but many bites are quite painful and elicit an appropriate reaction—a yelp and a pause in an otherwise extremely enjoyable play session.

Thus, your puppy learns that his sharp teeth and weak jaws can hurt. Since your puppy enjoys play-fighting, he will begin to inhibit the force of his biting to keep the game going. Thus, your puppy will learn to play-bite gently before he acquires the formidable teeth and strong jaws of an adolescent dog.

Forbidding a young puppy from biting altogether may offer immediate and temporary relief, but it is potentially dangerous because your puppy will not learn that her jaws can inflict pain. Consequently, if ever provoked or frightened as an adult, the resultant bite is likely to be painful and cause serious injury.

Certainly, puppy play-biting must be controlled, but only in a progressive and systematic manner. The puppy must be taught to inhibit the force of his bites, before puppy biting is forbidden altogether. Once your puppy has developed a soft mouth, there is plenty of time to inhibit the frequency of his now gentler mouthing.

Teaching your puppy to inhibit the force of her bites is a two-step process: first, teach the pup not to hurt you; and second, teach your pup not to exert any pressure at all when biting.

Thus, the puppy's biting will become gentle mouthing.

Teaching your puppy to inhibit the frequency of his mouthing is a two-step process: first, teach your puppy that whereas mouthing is OK, she must stop when requested; and second, teach your pup never to initiate mouthing unless requested.



### **No Pain**

It is not necessary to hurt or frighten your pup to teach her that biting hurts. A simple "Ouch!" is sufficient. If your pup acknowledges your "ouch" and stops biting, praise her, lure her to sit (to reaffirm that you are in control), reward her with a liver treat (or treat of some kind), and then resume playing. If your pup ignores the "ouch" and continues biting, yelp "Owwwww!" and leave the room. Your puppy has lost her playmate. Return after a 30-second time-out and make up by lure-rewarding your puppy to come, sit, lie down, and calm down, before resuming play.

Do not attempt to take hold of your pup's collar, or carry her to confinement; you are out of control and she will probably bite you again. Consequently, play with your puppy in a room where it is safe to leave her if she does not respond to your yelp. If she ignores you, she loses her playmate.

### **No Pressure**

Once your pup's biting no longer hurts, still pretend that it does. Greet harder nips with a yelp of pseudo-pain. Your puppy will soon get the idea: "Whoohhh! These humans are soooo super-sensitive. I'll have to be much gentler when I bite them." The pressure of your puppy's bites will progressively decrease until play-biting becomes play mouthing.

Never allow your puppy to mouth human hair or clothing. Hair and clothing cannot feel. Allowing a puppy to mouth hair, scarves, shoelaces, trouser legs, or gloved hands, inadvertently trains the puppy to bite harder, extremely close to human flesh!



### **Off!**

Once your pup exerts no pressure whatsoever when mouthing, then —and only then— teach him to reduce the frequency of his mouthing. Teach your puppy the meaning of "Off!" by hand feeding kibble. Your puppy will learn that gentle mouthing is OK, but he must stop the instant you ask him to stop.

### **Puppy Must Never Initiate Mouthing**

At this stage, your puppy should never be allowed to initiate mouthing (unless requested to do so).

By way of encouragement, mouthing-maniac puppies usually develop gentle jaws as adults because their many painful puppy bites elicited ample appropriate feedback. On the other hand, puppies that seldom play and roughhouse with other dogs, puppies that seldom bite their owners (e.g., shy, fearful, and standoffish pups), and breeds that have been bred to have soft mouths may not receive sufficient feedback regarding the pain and power of their jaws. This is the major reason to enroll your puppy in an off-leash puppy class right away.

Should a dog ever bite as an adult, both the prognosis for rehabilitation and the fate of the dog are almost always decided by the severity of the injury, which is predetermined by the level of bite inhibition the dog acquired during puppyhood. The most important survival lesson for a puppy is to learn bites cause pain! Your puppy can only learn this lesson if she is allowed to play-bite other puppies and people, and if she receives appropriate feedback.

Puppies bite at our hands and clothing because that is the way that puppies like to play. It is fun, and they enjoy our



attention. They particularly like it if we try to fight them off of us. Have you ever seen two or more puppies playing? They like to fight each other with their mouths and paws.

Normally, other puppies teach your puppy not to bite too hard by squealing in pain. When we take our puppy from the litter, these other puppies aren't around to teach proper bite inhibition any more. Some people advise trying to emulate a 'puppy squeal' to discourage biting too hard.

I don't know why, but people just don't seem to be very convincing with their squeals, so I don't recommend it as a training technique. What's more, some puppies seem to enjoy it when their human squeals and will get more excited, resulting in more biting. This is obviously not what we want puppy to do! If you can squeal and your puppy immediately stops biting, then this is an acceptable technique. Monitor the behavior long-term, though, to make sure biting too hard is decreasing.

Although bite inhibition is a vital lesson, making it a training goal doesn't mean you have to tolerate constant puppy mouthing. Puppy teeth hurt!

Work on bite inhibition only when your pup is calm and you have time to sit on the floor and play gently. If the pup bites too hard, yelp. If she backs off, reinforce with calming pats and more interaction. If she gets too excited and bites harder, end the game immediately.

To end the game, you must be able to get away from the puppy with as little fuss or attention as possible. Even negative attention is attention. It's often helpful to have the puppy tethered, so you can simply move back out of his reach. Or



play with her in a confined area and simply stand up and leave that space when he bites too hard.

Remember that play biting is a component of play behavior in puppies. Play is a form of social interaction. Realize that your puppy is trying to play with you even though the behavior is rough. To ensure that you are in control, be certain that each play session is initiated by you and not the puppy, and that you can end each session whenever you choose. One effective strategy when the play gets too rough is to immediately end the play session and leave. Social withdrawal can be a very powerful tool. Leave the puppy alone long enough to calm down (30 seconds to two minutes). If upon your return the wild playing begins again, leave again. Keep repeating until the puppy figures out that when he gets wild or bites, you immediately leave the room. Although it is tempting to pick the puppy up and take it out of the room, this interaction may be interpreted by your puppy as additional play and the biting may continue as you carry the puppy to a confinement location.

Again, keep the "time-outs" for short time periods, 30 seconds to 2 minutes and repeat, if necessary, until the puppy is calm. Owners, who cannot inhibit the puppy with yelping or time-outs, could consider an electronic alarm, air horn, squirt bottle or ultrasonic device, as soon as the biting becomes excessive. Use the device as discreetly as possible and immediately AFTER yelping first. Praise the puppy as soon as he lets go. Repeat as needed but remember to keep your extra "tool" like the squirt bottle or air horn hidden until needed and then hide it again immediately after its use. Do not leave it out or threaten the puppy with its use. Use it and then hide it.

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Children should **NOT** be allowed to use these devices but they should be supervised by an adult who can use these devices as discretely as possible.

I can also not stress enough that you don't nag her about the biting. This just teaches her to tune you out. Dogs don't continue with behaviors they aren't getting enjoyment from. Unfortunately, puppies get enjoyment from chewing on us and when the behavior escalates; our frustration usually does as well.

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