



PUPPY BITING AND CHEWING

One of the best things about puppies is how curious they are. We love watching them encounter new situations each day and helping them navigate through them. However, the downside is that puppies explore the world through their mouths! This can lead to some less than desirable bites to your hands, clothes, and household items. While we do not want to discourage a puppy's inclination to try new things, we do want to let them know the best way to go about it.

We should acknowledge puppies biting may also mean they are trying to communicate that they are hungry, tired, or need to go to the bathroom. Please make sure your puppy taken care of in all those areas before moving on to the following strategies.

Let's explore ways to help our puppies use their mouths appropriately and encourage time to settle.

Chewing on inappropriate items

Every puppy owner knows what it's like to have something stolen and chewed! As unwanted as this is, it can be a great time to teach our puppies how to trade and direct them towards their own toys. The most important part is to stay calm. We do not want our puppies to think that stealing things they shouldn't is a game.

If your puppy grabs something they shouldn't (and it is not life-threatening) you should:

1. Calmly call your puppy over to see if they will leave the item on their own. If they do, praise them and give them a toy they can play with! If it doesn't work...
2. Get some treats and trade your puppy for the item they are holding on to. If they will trade, gently remove the item and give them something else to play with.

Always offer a toy or treat to trade for the item in their mouth. Praise your puppy for letting go of the item it has. We want our puppies to trust us, and not become possessive of items they steal.

And of course, be prepared! Puppy proof your house and supervise your puppy. If they can't get to those coveted objects in the first place, they cannot practice stealing them. If your puppy is chewing on furniture, you can use gates or exercise pens to limit their access to these places.

Biting hands and other body parts

Those little shark teeth can hurt! Puppies will bite and nibble at different times during the day for different reasons. Sometimes it is for lack of something better to chew on, sometimes it is because they are frustrated, and sometimes it is a state of over-arousal where play can get too rough. Let's pick the reasons apart and talk about ways to help decrease the biting.



PUPPY BITING AND CHEWING (CONTINUED)

If your puppy is casually chewing on your hand...

This is something to discourage by gently giving your puppy something else to chew on. Direct them towards a toy or food puzzle. If you do not want your puppy chewing on other people's hands, they cannot be allowed to chew on yours either. If your puppy has enough things to chew on, and you can guide them to these items you will notice your puppy is less likely over time to pick your hands as a chew toy!

If your puppy bites when you tell them "no" or physically remove them from something...

Puppies may get frustrated when they don't understand the rules of the human world they live in. They typically do not know that it is bad to jump on the counters, grab your socks out of the laundry, not eat an entire jar of peanut butter. To them, the fun is being taken away and they are using their mouths to show you how upset they are. To help cut down on frustration, training your puppy what are and are not allowed to have access to is important.

You can set your puppy up for success by making sure their environment is set up with all the things they are allowed to have in it. Give them all the right answers! This way when they have choices later on, they will more likely pick the right path. Putting a leash on or going into a crate should be a fun activity, not just the end to the fun activity.

If your puppy bites when playing with you...

It's all fun and games until the puppy won't stop biting! Puppies can get overstimulated by many things; play is a big one. It all starts out fine, then after a couple minutes you start to notice that your puppy no longer wants their toys - just your hands and clothes! The first thing is to try and redirect them to a toy. And if that doesn't work, we need to help them understand that this is not an acceptable form of play. You can do this by quietly standing up and walking away for a few moments, then re-engaging with a toy. If that doesn't work, try separating yourself behind a gate for another few moments before re-engaging. The break in play will let your puppy know that when they get bite-y the game stops. When they have a soft mouth you can continue play.

OK... But my puppy bites REALLY hard!

True puppy aggression is rare, and if you think this is what you are seeing please contact a professional. For the rest of the puppies, it is OK when your puppy is biting and will not settle down to place them in a crate or exercise pen with something nice to chew on. We recommend KONG toys stuffed with peanut butter and treats or bully sticks. This will prevent your puppy from practicing biting you and direct their energy towards something appropriate. It is ok to do this several times a day. Make sure your puppy has many opportunities to explore and exercise during the day (mentally and physically). This will help cut down on the biting and chewing as well as tire your puppy out!