

Dog and Puppy Biting, Mouthing, Teething

Biting and mouthing is normal for young puppies and dogs, especially in play and while teething. You must teach your puppy or dog what is acceptable and what is not. Biting dogs may be loving, sweet, adorable, affectionate and wonderful 99% of the time and only 1% of the time will something specific happen to make them bite.

The best way to avoid biting and mouthing is to start early. Dogs normally learn bite inhibition before they are 4 months old from their mother, littermates and other members of the pack. Because we normally take them away from their pack before this learning is completed, we must take over the training. Allowing your puppy to socialize with other puppies and socialized dogs can help fill the training "gap" left when your puppy was separated from its pack. Puppies need to roll, tumble and play with each other. When they play, they bite each other everywhere and anywhere and learn to inhibit their biting and control themselves. If they get too rough or rambunctious, the other dogs and puppies react negatively and refuse to interact with them. Another advantage to early and dog to dog socialization is that it will help your dog to grow up confident rather than fearful of other dogs. It also provides an acceptable way to vent excess energy. Puppies that play with other puppies do not need to treat you like a littermate, so play biting on you and your family should dramatically decrease. Puppies that do not play with other puppies are generally much more prone to biting and mouthing and may also tend to be more hyperactive and destructive.

A lack of socialization often results in fearful or aggressive behavior. The two major negative reactions your dog may have to something is fear or aggression. Dogs that are not socialized with children often end up biting them. Anything you want your dog to be confident around, not be afraid of, and not act aggressively towards, you should socialize your puppy to before it is 4 months old.

Trust and respect inhibits biting. There are many other reasons a dog will bite and you must take an active role in teaching your dog what is and is not acceptable. However, before you can teach your dog anything, you must have your dog's trust and respect. If your dog doesn't trust you, there is no reason why he should respect you. If your dog does not respect you, your relationship will be like two 5 year olds bossing each other around. If your dog does not trust and respect you, then when you attempt to teach your dog something, he will regard you as if he were thinking, "Who do you think you are to tell me what to do?"

Use of Reprimands and Biting. Never hit, kick or slap your dog. Yes, your dog will still "love" you because even abused dogs love their owners but you won't have your dog's trust and respect. Most owners wait until a bite "happens" before trying to deal with it and are totally unprepared when it does - and do all the wrong things, thus making the problem worse, so be prepared!

Tips on Biting:

1. Reprimands alone will never stop biting.
2. If no respect exists, the biting will get worse. If you act like an equal, or littermate, to your dog, your dog will treat you as one.
3. If your dog does not trust you, it may eventually bite out of fear or lack of confidence.
4. Inconsistency sabotages training. If you let your dog bite some of the time, then biting will never be completely eliminated.
5. The dog must understand that it is the biting that you don't like, not the dog itself. Make up afterwards, but on your terms, not the dog's.

To discourage play biting and mouthing, use unscented spray deodorant on your arms, hands, and clothing. Make a loud noise like your dog hurt you and walk away and ignore it for 5 or 10 minutes. If you are unsure whether or not your dog's biting is playful or real aggression, consult a professional.

If your dog is behaving aggressively:

- ☞ Do not attempt to touch your pet, even if your intentions are to comfort or reassure it. When emotional energy is high, it must have an outlet. It may dissipate slowly over time or it may erupt spontaneously.
- ☞ Avoid challenging your pet, regardless of the cause of agitation. You are more likely to trigger an attack if you pursue the animal to its place of refuge or crowd it into a corner.
- ☞ Do not threaten your pet further with direct eye contact by behaving in a loud or angry manner.
- ☞ Do not take use your pet's aggressiveness as a reason to punish it or "teach it a lesson," it will only make the problem worse.
- ☞ Take any warning from your pet seriously and stay at a safe distance from it. If your pet is frightened, give it room to escape.
- ☞ Do not reach toward your pet with your hand and move slowly and quietly to a place of safety.
- ☞ Seek immediate professional help to prevent an escalation of the problem and deterioration of the bond between you and your pet.