

YIKES! MY PUP BITES!



*The information in this handout is intended as a general guide only.
The information relates to normal puppy play-biting and mouthing.*

*This information is not intended to address aggressive behaviour in dogs. If your dog
Has shown aggressive behaviour towards yourself or other people you should consult a
Qualified veterinarian behaviour expert.*

Mouthing and/or play-biting is usually associated with puppies or young dogs. This behaviour is normal behaviour in puppies and young dogs.

If you watch dogs play together, they mouth each other with mock bites. As part of the dog's social group they will often play with humans in the same way.

Why play biting is not acceptable behaviour

Puppies have sharp teeth but a weak jaw, this means that his puppy bite may be uncomfortable but not do any serious damage. As an adult dog your puppy will have larger teeth and a relatively strong jaw. While other dogs, that have tougher skin than humans, may not be hurt by play bites people can be damaged.

It is essential that puppies learn not to bite while they are still small. What may look cute when puppies play-bite each other, it has more serious consequences to people as the pup gets older.

Why do puppies play bite?

When puppies are still in a litter they start to come in contact with their litter-mates as they move around. As they grow they begin to mouth and bite each other. They spend a lot of time play-biting and grabbing each other with their mouths - they don't have hands and so mouths are a good way to interact and play.

Litter-mates learn not to bite too hard. If you watch them play you will see that if one pup gets bitten too hard he will yelp and stop playing with the offending pup. This teaches the pup that if he wants to play with his mates he needs to be softer when he bites. This is called "bite inhibition".

When puppies become part of our social group they use their natural doggy behaviours to “play” with their human friends. This is a normal extension of how he played with his litter-mates

We have to teach the puppy that this is not acceptable with his human litter-mates- t a

Playing “rough house” with puppies just encourages them to bite and it will not be his fault if he thinks he can play like this with anyone who he has contact with. Do not play these types of games with young pups particularly if they come into contact with children.

What can we do to stop the pup/young dog biting?

There are different ways you can teach the pup to inhibit his bite:

- “Ouch”! That hurt!
- Withdrawn attention
- “Leave”
- Settle or calm

A combination of these methods works best and they must be used every time the pup bites. If you do not consistently use the methods the pup will learn that he can bite, sometimes. All members of the family have to be taught and use the same method otherwise the pup will be confused and the behaviour may increase.

Combined method

Just like the pup’s litter mates you are going to tell the pup that when he bites that is not acceptable.

When the pup touches you with his teeth, say “Ouch” in a high pitched loud voice. You must do this as soon as you feel his teeth and make it loud enough to cause him to withdraw his mouth. When he removes his mouth, take your hand away from him and ignore him for about 10 seconds.

In most cases the pup will startle and try to appease you by licking your hand. If he does this you can continue to play with him. It may take repeated sessions for the pup to understand “Ouch”, as you are trying to overcome natural dog behaviour.

Withdraw attention

If the pup continues to bite you will need to Withdraw your attention altogether. Turn your back and ignore him for several seconds to see if he will settle. If he does not settle Within a reasonable amount of time remove him to a room or you go elsewhere for several seconds and let him settle.

Five or ten seconds is usually enough to get the PUP to settle.

Leaving him for longer periods will not help as the pup could then become confused and develop other behaviour problems.

He needs to understand that it is the bite that we don’t want and so you must be quick in your response then continue your Interaction with the pup once he has settled.

Why you should avoid physical punishment to stop puppies from biting.

Some people will tell you to smack the pups nose if he bites you, or grab the dogs muzzle (very hard to do to a pug!) and hold it shut and “growl at him”.

These methods may deter the pup in the short term, but can cause problems long term. It makes the pup unsure of what your hand means – Are you going to smack or pat? If he thinks he will be smacked he may try to defend himself and become offensive as he sees you as a possible threat.

Children in particular can suffer the consequences of this method as they often wave their hand about and the dog might misinterpret what they are doing.

This could lead the dog to believe he needs to defend himself against the child. Human punish with their hands, dogs punish with teeth, far better for the dog to learn that humans are friends not foes

Points to Remember

- **You must react EVERY time you feel the puppies teeth**
- **If the touch is unexpected use a quick yelp or “Owch”**
- **Always supervise children when they are with the dog**
- **Do not play “rough house” games with the pup and do not let anyone else play this way with your pup**

Remember dogs have bad days too, try an avoid playing with your dog if he is eating or trying to rest.