

Puppy Biting

The following article is taken from Dr. Ian Dunbar's *Puppy Biting Behavior Blueprint*.



It's a Puppy Thing! Puppy biting rarely causes harm, but many bites can be painful and when done to its doggie Mom or Dad or litter mates usually elicits an appropriate reaction through a yelp and a pause in extremely enjoyable play sessions. With you it should be the same and your puppy should then learn that its sharp teeth and weak jaws can hurt. Since your puppy enjoys play-biting, it should begin to inhibit the force of its biting to keep the game going. Then your puppy will learn to play bite

gently before it acquires the strong teeth and 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 its jaws can inflict pain. Therefore, if ever provoked or frightened as an adult, the resulting bite can be painful and indeed cause serious injury.

The puppy must be taught to inhibit the force of its 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 its now gentler mouthing.

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

Teaching NO PAIN

It is not necessary to hurt or frighten you puppy to teach it that sharp little puppy teeth hurt when it bites you. A simple "Ouch!" or quick yelp should be fine. If your pup stops biting, praise it and get it to sit. This helps establish that you are in control. Then you can reward them with a yummy treat and resume playing. If your puppy ignores the "ouch" and

continues biting, really make it a big “Owwwwwww” and leave the room. Your puppy has lost its playmate.

Return after a 30-to one minute time out and make up by 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 it to confinement when they are out of control. It will probably bite you again. Consequently, play with your puppy in a room where it is safe to leave it if it does not respond to your yelp. If it ignores you, she loses her playmate.

Teaching NO PRESSURE

Once your pup's biting no longer hurts, still pretend that it does. Greet harder nips with a yelp of pain. Your puppy will soon get the idea: "Whooahh! These humans are soooo super-sensitive. I'll 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. 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!

By way of encouragement, crazy for biting puppies usually develop gentle mouths as adults because their many painful puppy bites got ample and appropriate feedback. On the other end of the spectrum 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 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 as a puppy. The important survival lesson for a puppy is to learn that bites cause pain. Your puppy can only learn this lesson if it is allowed to play-bite other puppies and people, and if it receives appropriate feedback.

For more detailed about bite-inhibition exercises, you can sign up for a Crash Puppy course offered through our Ask The Trainer Services by calling **764-1121** or email askthetrainer@cabq.gov