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Biting/Mouthy Behavior in Puppies

Puppies explore the world by putting things in their mouths. When your puppy comes home he has just left a world where he plays with his litter mates using his teeth. The razor sharp teeth were hardly felt by your puppy's siblings, but boy they can hurt our sensitive skin.

So how do we teach them to not bite so hard? It is natural behavior for puppies to bite in play. We need to teach them is to bite more softly by giving them feedback that the bite was too hard. Make a very quick and loud yelping sound or yell with a high pitch OUCH. Most puppies will back off when you do this. Begin yelping at the hardest bites and ignoring the softer ones. As you slowly progress, yelp at gradually softer pressure until your puppy can mouth you with no pressure at all. If your yelp scares your puppy, tone it down. The purpose is to startle your puppy not scare him. *What if your puppy does not back away when you yelp?* The best thing to do is to walk away in a huff and come back a minute or two later.

Why do we allow our puppies to bite at all? Studies show that dogs who learn to control the pressure of their bite, if pushed to defend themselves when an adult, will do less damage with their teeth. When your dog reaches adolescence at about 5 months of age, you should no longer allow your dog to put a mouth on you at all. For example, do not allow dogs or puppies to grab your hand when you have a toy in your hand. If your dog does mouth your hand, say a cue like "game over" and abruptly walk away.

Dogs often use our hands as play toys when they are bored. Make sure you have a toy close by at all times to redirect them when they are mouthing you. If your puppy is teething, safe chews toys are the best thing to provide for them.

With older puppies and adolescent dogs, you can use a squirt bottle with water if they insist on playing too roughly with people. One problem with this technique is you have to be 100% consistent with this training, which means you need to carry a squirt bottle on you. It can quickly communicate the limits of appropriate behavior if you are consistent, though.

If you follow these simple steps you should have a puppy who learns how to use his mouth politely and appropriately.

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