



CURBING PUPPY NIPPING AND MOUTHING

Puppy mouthing and nipping are normal and natural behaviors that are part of how pups learn, investigate, and play. Most pups mouth very little in the first few days to weeks of life in their new home. But, as they become more comfortable, confident, energetic, and as they lose their baby teeth and their adult teeth emerge, mouthing and nipping tends to increase dramatically.

Your pup needs your guidance to learn to inhibit mouthing and nipping people. Otherwise this behavior can continue on, even with an adult dog, and interacting with and playing with your pup is not as much fun. Observing how a pup spends the first eight weeks of his life with his mother and littermates can provide some insight into the most effective means of teaching puppies the skill of inhibiting the force of their bite and eventually not nipping and mouthing people at all. If he bites too hard on his mother while nursing or littermates while playing, this is usually met with the 'injured' party disengaging. This means a temporary lack of access to the mother's milk and to playtime with littermates.

Similarly, you will need to provide your pup with loads of calm and consistent feedback in regards to mouthing and nipping people. The two primary areas of focus should be:

To keep your pup on a light leash during all play times as a means of being able to effectively manage and give your pup feedback in the form of holding them at arm's length to prevent them from interacting with you.

To provide your pup with loads of 'legal' options for chewing (i.e. chew toys).

TEETHING TIPS!

While rigorous, prolonged play periods may tire your pup out, they might also over-stimulate him. An overtired pup tends to have a harder time exhibiting self-control, especially in regards to mouthing and nipping. So be sure to provide your pup with plenty of age-appropriate rest.

Yelling at a pup and/or grabbing their muzzle while saying something like "no biting" should be avoided. Doing so may result in a pup that responds with increased defensive/agitated biting or a pup that becomes fearful of human hands reaching towards them.

On Leash Supervision

1. Keeping your pup on a light leash during supervised play allows you to gently move them away for a brief break from the fun of playtime in response to mouthing and nipping. On leash supervision also serves to prevent housetraining mistakes, chewing inappropriate items, and a host of other unwanted behaviors.
2. When your pup nips, hold the leash in your outstretched arm so your pup can't get access to you. Temporarily ceasing any interaction provides your pup effective feedback about what works and what does not work during social encounters with people.
3. Be prepared to repeat this response many, many times with your pup. One-trial learning is a rare thing. It typically takes loads of repetitions to build strong muscles, whether physical or learning muscles.
4. Another option during on leash play is to have your pup tethered to a stable object so if biting occurs you can quickly step back and out of your pup's reach.

Follow brief pauses in play by re-engaging in a manner that encourages polite behavior. For example, asking your pup to hand target, sit, down, or stand.

Puppies and Children

1. When children are interacting with your pup, be sure there is always an adult present to supervise and be extra diligent about having your pup on leash.
The leash can be held by an adult or tethered to a stable object.
2. Use the leash to move the pup away from the child if they mouth or nip or if the pup is tethered, instruct the child to step away.
3. Once you have set a foundation for hand targeting, sit, down, and stand, children can play the training game with your pup. This makes for a lovely, polite, fun, and safe interaction.
4. Puppies should never be allowed to chase and nip at the heels of children and having the puppy on leash and held by an adult or tethered to a stable object is simple prevention.

Chew Toys

1. Be considerate of the fact that your pup needs safe and 'legal' outlets for his need to chew. Durable hollow chew toys are ideal because they can be filled with healthy food. This makes them highly desirable for your pup.
2. Ingestible chew toys are also an option. But, keep in mind that many are high in sodium, which may make your pup very thirsty.
3. Stuffed, plush toys can be great options for interactive play with you, such as fetch and tug (please read the handout on Tug-of-War for rules of polite engagement). But, it is generally not advisable to leave these with your pup when you are not there to supervise as they may rip them apart and ingest the stuffing and/or squeaker.