



Paw Prints

Resource sheet:

Teach your pup not to bite people, even in play

Puppy biting is a normal, natural behaviour. However, while it is appropriate for puppies to mouth-wrestle with each other, it is not appropriate for puppies to use their mouths to play with people. As they get older, and their jaw strength develops, play-biting can become hazardous to people, particularly children. Dogs over the age of six months should not be play-biting with people at all.

To help your puppy or dog understand that nipping or biting people is not appropriate, it is helpful to break it down into training stages. First, eliminate situations in which the puppy might choose to play-bite people. Then concentrate on teaching the puppy that it is inappropriate to play-bite people. See the instructions below for how to do this.

Step 1 — Control the incidence of mouthing/biting

Start by preventing situations in which your puppy might choose to nip or bite, especially in a "play" context. Never encourage your puppy to "mouth" you, including "rough-housing" and wrestling-style play.

Eliminate inappropriate play by children around your dog — play that encourages unnecessary and uncontrolled mouthing from your dog towards them.

Step 2 — Teach the puppy that biting hurts people

Rule: No painful bites, no teeth on skin — stop the puppy from hurting people. It is not necessary to physically punish the puppy. This can make your puppy more excited and damage the puppy's temperament by eroding his/her trust in you. However, it is essential to let the puppy know when biting hurts. A simple "ouch!" is usually sufficient.

Time out for 30 seconds to one minute (no longer!) is an effective exercise if the puppy is very excited and biting vigorously. Leave the room and shut the puppy inside. Let him/her out when s/he is quiet and immediately ask him/her for a Sit before resuming play.

Step 3 — Teach a soft mouth by fingertip feeding

Fingertip feed your puppy part of his/her meal, only releasing each piece of food when the puppy is being gentle. This will also increase the puppy's confidence with people around food.

Step 4 — Redirect biting onto a toy

Each time you play with your puppy, pick up a soft toy or chew toy. If the puppy mouths or bites at you, say "off" or "no" and then wiggle the toy for the puppy to bite instead.

With this exercise, you are allowing your puppy to do natural chewing, mouthing behaviour, but on a toy instead of a person. You will soon find that when the puppy gets the urge to mouth, s/he will find a toy to do it on.

We do not recommend encouraging play mouthing, only to use the above guidelines to manage it when it occurs.