

ALL WELL BEHAVED PUPPIES SHOULD BITE

One of the first questions I am asked by the new puppy owner is: "How do I stop my puppy from biting with those razor sharp teeth?"

It would be great if I could offer an instant solution to this problem, but it would be unwise of me to do so. As the title of this section suggests, puppies have a need to bite, as it is an essential part of their development. At this stage puppies are learning to communicate, not just with other dogs, but with other species of animal too - namely us!

When puppies play together, you will hear yelps, squeals or even growls as one puppy tries to communicate to another that it has been bitten too hard. You might even notice the game stops as things get out of hand. During this time the puppies learn how hard they need to bite before causing pain or damage to their friends. It is interesting to watch a well-socialized adult dog playing with a young puppy.

Although teeth are used, the adult will play very gently, and the skills, which enable him to do so, have been learnt during the "razor teeth" period.

Fortunately, dogs can learn to play with their human companions without causing pain or injury, but before I describe how this can be achieved, I shall look at some other methods which you might hear from friends, vets, breeders, old fashioned trainers, or perhaps read in the many books available on puppy training.

One such method suggests that you smack the puppy across the nose every time it bites, whilst yelling "NO" at the top of your voice.

Advantage: You might stop your puppy from biting instantly!

Disadvantages:

1. The dog might well become hand shy, which means that when you come to use your hands for praise and fuss, he could flinch or cringe.
2. He might become aggressive in an attempt to defend himself.
3. I will guarantee this: the puppy will fail to learn the valuable lesson of bite inhibition, i.e. how to moderate his jaw strength and pressure, which means that if you accidentally step on the dogs paw, or a child grabs hold of his collar, a severe bite may follow. However if the puppy has learnt bite inhibition, the chances of being bitten as a result of an accidental confrontation is significantly reduced.

Therefore the method that I am about to suggest will teach your puppy not to bite in the safest and most effective manner possible. However, it does take some time to accomplish!

1. Allow your puppy to mouth at your hands and fingers. When he bites too hard yell "ouch" as loudly as you can, and move your hand well out of the way.
You need to look and sound very convincing. With very excitable puppies it might not be a bad idea to vacate the room for a couple of minutes to give the puppy time to calm down. Note that I suggest that YOU leave the room and not the puppy!
This is because by the time you have put the puppy outside; he would have forgotten what all the fuss was about.
2. Keep repeating this process over the coming weeks, so that the puppy learns that even the slightest level of mouthing hurts, this way he will understand that those pink, fleshy things called "humans" are very delicate creatures.
3. Avoid pushing your puppy away when he is biting, because pushing becomes a game. If the puppy is driving you absolutely crazy, walk out of the room and make sure you close the door behind you. If at this stage the puppy starts howling and scratching at the door, try tapping on the door, or poking your head around the corner whilst shouting at him to "shut up".

Like children, puppies can become very over excited and this can be a major cause of them biting you even harder. When this happens, there are several things which you can try: If the excitement has been caused through play, then stop the game and call a "time out". In future ensure that your games do not reach such a fever pitch. Some who have attended my puppy classes have discovered that restraining the puppy, perhaps by trying him to a hook on the wall (on a lead which is long enough to allow the puppy to settle down) and then ignoring him for a while, works quite well. With my own puppy, I clipped him to his lead, sat down and then ran my feet across the lead until he settled down of his own accord, at which point I praised and rewarded him for being quiet. Generally an over stimulated puppy will soon settle down and fall asleep - once you have taken control of the situation.

Indoor kennels (fancy words for cages) are exceptionally good for this type of situation. Provided the kennel is not misused, they can be turned into extremely pleasant and cosy areas to relax in, or perhaps as a retreat - away from noisy children or other dogs. Under no circumstances should the indoor kennel be treated as a punishment cell, or areas to be confined for long periods of time. Sometimes when my puppies became over stimulated I placed them inside their cage and threw a blanket over the top (as well as inside) so that the cage became a doggy cave. I discovered that this calmed them down very quickly and they were soon very relaxed and fell fast asleep.

Grabbing At Clothing

If your puppy becomes over excited to the point that he begins to grab at your clothing, stand still for a few minutes, avoiding eye contact. Any movement will prolong 'the game'. However if this method fails, try wafting something smelly under his nose such as a pot of Vicks, or perhaps the lid of an Olbus Oil or Citronella Oil

container. With some puppies it takes a little experimenting before you find something which they dislike the smell of. If you are going to try this method then I suggest that you give the puppy a verbal warning e.g. "back Off" so that he receives the opportunity to avoid the 'nasty niff' in future.

I personally found that placing Nalle in his cage was the most effective way of teaching him not to grab at my clothing, as by the time he became this hyped up, he was just about ready to go to bed. Another reason I discovered for this behaviour was that he had begun to teethe and I could honestly say that during this period Nalle became an absolute nightmare to live with. If you think teething might be behind your puppy's biting or hyperactive behaviour then hold tight - this phase WILL pass!

All being well, if you keep repeating the above processes over the coming six to eight weeks, by the time your puppy has gained his adult teeth you should have noticed that he no longer plays, or demands attention by using his teeth ... however, I say "all being well" because there are other reasons why some puppies may continue biting, and we will return to these issues at a later stage.