



# PUPPY BITING AND MOUTHING

## Why Do Puppies Bite

Puppies bite. It is a normal behavior necessary for appropriate social development.

Dogs are social animals. In order to live peacefully in a group setting, they need to learn to manage conflict, and to control the lethal weapons that they carry in their mouths.

Puppies mouth and bite each other constantly in play. This is how they learn bite inhibition, or how to control the force of their bite. When one puppy bites too hard, his playmate will yelp and stop playing. The puppies soon learn that hard bites end the fun times.

A puppy's teeth are very small and sharp, and their jaw muscles are relatively weak, so they inflict pain without doing much actual damage. Puppy biting and mouthing continues until the adult teeth begin to come in, about 4 to 5 months of age.

Since puppies usually leave their litters between 8 and 10 weeks of age, it is up to their human family to continue bite inhibition lessons. If you never allow your puppy to mouth you, he will never learn to inhibit the force of his jaws.

Every adult dog, at some point in his life, will be hurt or frightened enough to bite. For example, someone may trip over him, he may be startled out of a deep sleep, or he gets his foot slammed in a door. A dog with good bite inhibition may growl, or even snap, but will not cause damage as a result.

*If your puppy is never given the opportunity to play-bite other puppies and people he will never learn to control the force of his bite. Only when your puppy has learned to mouth gently should you begin to discourage mouthing.*

## Teaching Bite Inhibition (a three step process)

### No Pain

When your puppy is biting during play give a loud, high pitched "Ouch!" for any painful bites. If your puppy backs off, call the puppy to you, ask for a sit, then resume play. If your puppy continues to bite hard after the "Ouch!", abruptly leave the room for a short (30 second) time out. When you return call the puppy to you, ask for a sit and a minute of calm behavior, then resume play.



Charlotte, Golden Retriever

Hand feeding your puppy gives you another opportunity to reinforce no hard biting. If your puppy bites hard when taking the food give a loud "OUCH!" and take a short break from feeding.

Hand feeding, play wrestling and games like tug-of-war are a great way to continue to monitor bite inhibition throughout your dog's life. In all cases your dog should wait for a cue, such as "take it" or "playtime" before putting his mouth on any object, or on you. See the tip sheet *Games To Play With Your Dog* for more information on how to use these games to reinforce training and teach your dog self control.

**Seek immediate help from a qualified, positive trainer if your puppy growls, snaps or bites when you are:**

- Trying to pick him up
- Grooming
- Feeding
- Trying to take something away

### No Pressure

Once your puppy's play bites no longer hurt continue with the "OUCH!" until you are only feeling the gentlest of pressure. Your puppy should only be allowed to mouth your hands where you have the greatest sensitivity to pain and pressure. Never let your puppy mouth your mouth your clothes, pull your hair, or chew on your shoes or shoe laces.

### Puppy Never Initiates Mouthing

Now that your puppy is consistently mouthing gently teach your puppy "leave it" so he doesn't put his mouth on objects, or on you, without permission. (For more information on how to teach "leave it" contact us at [info@yourcaninecoach.com](mailto:info@yourcaninecoach.com).)



Samson, English Mastiff

This tip sheet is not intended as a substitute for training. Please consult a qualified trainer for additional help.

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