

Mouthing - Dogs Don't Have Hands!



Pet Professional Guild Educational Handout #8

Why Training Bite Inhibition is Important

Puppies have needle-sharp teeth that really hurt so it is important to train them to control their biting and mouthing behavior from an early age. If we do not, rough play or other interactions could cause people to get hurt. Also, biting and mouthing can negatively impact people's ability to bond with their pup.

How to Train Bite Inhibition

Mouthing – a pup putting his teeth on your skin and softly closing his mouth – is a natural behavior. This description sounds gentle, but puppies' teeth are tiny and sharp, so it is possible for them to break skin while mouthing. Mouthing is not aggression; it is how a pup plays with other puppies and how he investigates his world.



In a puppy's world, his mouth is like the human hand. Puppies use their mouths to move objects around and to hold on to things. Telling them not to mouth us is thus rather like someone telling us not to use our hands. Understanding this fact will help give you the patience that you will need during the process of the pup learning not to mouth humans.



Never hit any dog or pup, especially for mouthing, because human hands must always mean good things to puppies. Hand feeding your puppy is an excellent idea. This will help him bond with you, prevent food bowl aggression, and make him think that human hands are just great.

The easiest way to teach your pup to gradually stop mouthing is to keep a variety of toys available all times. Praising him for mouthing toys is a simple thing you can do to prevent him from getting in the habit of mouthing people. Next, when approaching him, have a toy in your hand so that he can mouth the toy instead of you. If he mouths you anyway, temporarily stop all interaction with the pup.

It is common to see a pup mouthing and the owner saying, “no, stop it, no, ouch, no, no, no biting, that’s not nice.” All these words are often accompanied by pushing and gentle shoving in an attempt to discourage the mouthing. These attempts to stop him mouthing actually teach the puppy that mouthing can prompt a fun game. For many dogs, this human reaction serves to reward the mouthing behavior. You have just accidentally made mouthing much more interesting. If you give the mouthing this type of attention, you will usually get more of it. Remember, even negative attention is rewarding for many puppies (and adult dogs for that matter).

If your pup mouths at you, do not cry out and snatch your hand away. That turns it into a game for him. Instead stay still, calmly and safely extract your hand, then get up and walk away. After 20 seconds to two minutes you can try again. Have a treat ready to reward him if he mouths the toy instead of you. Alternatively, you can play with the pup with the toy. If he mouths you again, you walk away again or try to distract him with the toy. Be consistent! Make sure that mouthing toys gets the puppy play, praise and treats while mouthing you gets him nothing.



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Pet dog owners should begin training and socializing their dog as soon as he/she joins the family. All training should be done in a positive manner using rewards based, scientifically sound training methods. Please consult the Pet Professional Guild’s Directory to find a trainer in your area:

Pet Professional Guild Directory:
www.petprofessionalguild.com/PetGuildMembers.

To learn more about force-free training and humane, up-to-date, scientifically sound behavior modification and training methods, see www.petprofessionalguild.com

