

## **Puppy Nipping And Mouthing Behavior**

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One of the most frustrating problems that owners have to address with young puppies is the playful mouthing and nipping of hands, arms, legs and clothing of the people around them. Puppies often nip or mouth as a part of play and in greeting. This behavior isn't usually intended to do harm but it can tear clothes and result in cuts and bruises on bare skin. If left uncontrolled, it can get worse because the puppy thinks it is an acceptable way to greet and play with people. Here are some things to think about in dealing with this problem.

Teach acceptable behavior. Rather than just focusing on the bad behavior, ask yourself "What would I rather have my puppy do?" and then think about how you can get her to do it. If all you do is think about how to stop the inappropriate behavior she will never learn anything new. If your dog is nipping or mouthing people when petting her, try giving her a tasty bit of food or a chew object like a rawhide to occupy her while you pet her. Teach her to sit quietly for a tidbit when you try to pet her or greet her. Distract her with an appropriate toy or chew object when she approaches you to playfully nip or bite.

Minimize inappropriate behavior. Never encourage your puppy to grab you or your clothes. Don't play tug-of-war games with mouthy puppies as this seems to encourage nipping. If she does grab or nip you or your clothes, cross your arms and look away from her or walk away from her so she learns that nipping gets no response from you. Don't laugh, look at her or give in to her play as this rewards the behavior. If your puppy is worse when children are playing, try to keep her separated from the play or put her on a leash so her behavior can be controlled. Never let children tease or excite puppies into nipping and mouthy play.

Use punishment correctly. If these strategies don't work, squirt her with water from a squirt bottle or make a loud sound from a whistle or air horn. You must catch her in the act, not afterward and you must punish her every time she nips in order for it to work. Pet her quietly or give her a chew toy when she does stop the nipping to reward the calm, relaxed behavior. Don't punish her by hitting, slapping, kicking or other physical means. This sort of punishment can cause fear or aggression or even make the problem worse.

Dealing with puppies takes patience and consistency. Everyone in the household should deal with the puppy in the same way to teach her the new behaviors. Taking the time to deal with these problems as soon as they arise makes it easier correct them and is a lot easier than trying to correct more serious problems later in life.