

## Puppy Biting -More Than Bad Manners by Ian Dunbar PhD, MSVC

Puppies bite and thank goodness they do! Puppy biting is essential for your puppy to develop a soft mouth. Puppy biting seldom causes appreciable harm but many bites are painful and elicit reaction. The pup learns it's jaws can hurt and therefore, begins to inhibit the force of its biting before it acquires the formidable teeth and strong jaws of an adolescent.

Completely curtailing puppy biting may offer immediate relief but the puppy will not have sufficient opportunity to learn that its jaws may inflict pain. Consequently, if ever provoked as an adult, the resultant bite is likely to be a hard one. Certainly puppy biting must be controlled but only in a progressive and systematic manner whereby the pup is first taught to inhibit the force of its bites, before puppy biting is forbidden altogether.

Once the puppy develops a soft mouth, there is plenty of time to inhibit the frequency of its now gentler mouthing.

It is not necessary to hurt, frighten, or punish the pup to teach it biting hurts. A simple "Ouch" is sufficient. If your pup acknowledges the "ouch" and desists, praise and resume playing, but in a calmer fashion. If your pup ignores the "ouch", emphasize "ouch" and leave the room. Your puppy has lost its playmate. Return after one or two minutes time-out and make up by having your puppy come, sit and calm down before resuming play.

Once your pup's biting no longer hurts, still pretend it does. Greet harder nips with a yelp of pseudo-pain. Your puppy will soon get the idea, "Whooahh! These humans are super-sensitive. I have to be much more gentle." The pressure of your puppy's bites will progressively decrease until biting becomes mouthing or slobbering.

NEVER allow your puppy to mouth human hair or clothing. Hair and clothing can feel neither pressure nor pain. Consequently, allowing a pup to mouth hair, scarves, shoelaces, or gloved hands etc., inadvertently trains the pup to bite harder, extremely close to human flesh!

Once your pup exerts no pressure whatsoever when mouthing, then and only then, teach the pup to reduce the frequency of mouthing. Teach the meaning of "Off" by hand feeding kibble (see the SIRIUS Puppy Training video), so your pup may learn gentle mouthing is OK, but it must stop the instant you say "Off", At this Stage, your puppy should never be allowed to initiate mouthing (unless requested to do so). Byway of encouragement though, mouthing-maniac puppies generally develop exceedingly gentle jaws as adults, since their many painful bites have elicited ample appropriate feedback. On the other hand, puppies which seldom play and roughhouse with other dogs, puppies which seldom bite their owners ( e.g., shy, or fearful pups), and/or breeds which have been bred to have soft mouths, may not receive sufficient feedback concerning the power of their jaws. This is the major reason puppy class instructors go to great lengths to encourage shy and standoffish dogs to play in class. Should a dog ever bite as an adult, both the prognosis for rehabilitation and the fate of the dog are almost always decided by the severity of the injury , which is predetermined by the level of bite inhibition the dog learned during puppy hood. The most important survival lesson for a puppy to learn is: Bites cause pain and of course, the pup can only learn this lesson, if it bites, and if the bites give appropriate feedback.

## More on "biting" from Dr. Ian Dunbar's puppy training video ...

Dogs must learn to inhibit their bite before they are 4 months old. Normally, they would learn this from their mother, their littermates and other members of the pack, But, because we take them away from this environment before this learning is completed, we must take over the training.

By allowing your puppy to socialize with other puppies and socialized dogs (naturally in a safe manner because of vaccinations) they can pick up where they left off. Puppies need to roll, tumble and play with each other. When they play, they bite each other everywhere and anywhere. This is where they learn to inhibit their biting. This is where they learn to control themselves. If they are too rough or rambunctious, they will find out because of how the other dogs and puppies react and interact with them. This is something that happens naturally and it is something we cannot accomplish. It can only be learned from trial and error. There is nothing you can say or do to educate them in this realm. They must learn from their own experience.

Another major advantage of dog to dog socialization besides the fact that it will help your dog to grow up

not being fearful of other dogs is that they can vent their energy in an acceptable manner. Puppies that have other puppies to play with do not need to treat you like littermates. So the amount of play biting on you and your family should dramatically decrease. Puppies that do not play with other puppies are generally much more hyperactive and destructive in the home as well. A major cause of biting is due to lack of socialization. Lack of socialization results in fearful or aggressive behavior.

The two major reactions a dog has to something it is afraid of is to avoid it or to act aggressive in an attempt to make it go away. This is the most common cause of children being bitten. Dogs that are not socialized with children will bite them. The optimum time to socialize is before the dog reaches 4 months. With large breed dogs, 4 months may be too late, simply because at this age the puppy may already be too large for most mothers of young children to feel comfortable around. For most owners, the larger the dog is, the more difficult it is to control, especially around children. If there is anything you do not want your dog to be afraid of or aggressive towards, you must begin to socialize your puppy with them before it is 4 months old.

There are many other reasons your dog will bite and you will have to take an active role in teaching them. However, before you can teach your dog anything, there are two prerequisites that are essential. They are trust and respect. If your dog doesn't trust you, there is no reason why he should respect you. If your dog does not respect you, your relationship will be like two 5 year olds bossing each other around. If your dog does not trust and respect you, then when you attempt to teach your dog something, he will regard you as if he were thinking, "Who do you think you are to tell me what to do?"

Never hit, kick or slap your dog. This is the quickest way to erode the dog's trust in you. Yes, he will still love you. Even abused dogs love their owners. A unique characteristic of dogs is their unconditional love. You don't have to do anything to acquire your dog's love. But you must do a lot to gain your dog's trust and respect. Another area where we destroy our dog's trust in us is when we scold or punish them for house-soiling mistakes and accidents. When housetraining your puppy, there is never a right time to punish or reprimand. If you catch your dog in the act, say "No" and quickly pick him up and carry him outside. When he does his business, praise him loudly. You have no right to scold him, because if he is going in the wrong place, it is your fault, not his. If you find an accident after the fact, just clean it up. If you watch a litter of puppies playing, you will notice that they spend much of their time biting and grabbing each other with their mouths. This is normal puppy behavior. When you take a puppy from the litter and into your home, the puppy will play bite and mouth you. This is normal behavior, but needs to be modified so you and the puppy will be happy. The first thing to teach your new puppy is that human flesh is much more sensitive than other puppies and that it really hurts us when they bite. This is called bite inhibition. A puppy has very sharp teeth and a weak jaw. This means that the puppy can cause you to be uncomfortable when mouthing or puppy biting you, but can not cause severe damage. An adult dog has duller teeth and a powerful jaw. This means that an adult dog can cause significant damage when biting. **ANY DOG WILL BITE GIVEN THE RIGHT CIRCUMSTANCES!** If a small child falls on your adult dog and sticks a finger in the dog's eye, you should not be surprised if the dog bites. If you do a good job teaching your puppy bite inhibition, you should get a grab and release without damage. If you don't, you may get a hard bite with significant damage.