

PUPPY MOUTHING, NIPPING, AND BITING – BITE INHIBITION AND TEACHING OFF

Bite inhibition

1. No hard bites or pressure.
 - (a) When the puppy is calm, place your hand in its mouth and praise it when it mouths softly.
 - (b) Give an immediate, loud 'ouch!' whenever the puppy applies too much pressure, and stop playing with it. Once the puppy ceases, you can give it an alternative form of play or attention (e.g., chew toy, exercise session, training session) or a settle exercise (see our settle exercise handout), and reward the desirable behavior.
2. Mild attempts at deterring the puppy and physically discouraging the puppy can actually serve to increase the intensity of play and biting.
3. Gentle mouthing as a form of play is OK, but it should not be initiated by the puppy, and the family must be able to stop it on command. Any hard biting or overexuberant play must be discouraged.
4. Avoid tug of war if the pet becomes too excited, aggressive, or out of control. Tug of war games should only be allowed when you have initiated them and when you can quickly stop the game on command with an ouch, give, or drop command.
5. If the puppy is constantly demanding attention through mouthing and biting or is overexuberant in its play, then it is likely not receiving sufficient stimulation. You should consider additional or longer periods of play, training, and exercise, and more outlets for chewing to pre-empt the puppy's unacceptable play biting.
6. If the puppy cannot be quickly calmed and settled, then confining it away from the target (e.g., children, visitors) until it settles may be necessary. When the puppy is calm it can then be released, and encouraged to play in an appropriate manner.
7. For those problems that cannot be quickly and effectively controlled with bite inhibition techniques, a leash and head halter can be left attached when the puppy is with the family. Mouthing or biting can be immediately stopped with a pull on the leash, with tension released as soon as the puppy settles. The leash and head halter can also be used to teach the off command by first giving the command and if the puppy does not immediately cease, pulling the hand back and guiding the dog into the proper response with a pull on the leash.
8. For some puppies in some homes, all forms of hard mouthing and play biting may be unacceptable. This may be the case when there are elderly or young children in the home.

Teaching off

The purpose of this command is to get the puppy to stop mouthing or playbiting on command.

Procedure:

1. Present a piece of food to get the pet's attention, say 'OK' in a friendly tone of voice and give the food.
2. Present another piece of food and say 'off' in a firm tone of voice, but don't yell.
 - (a) If the puppy doesn't make contact with your hand or the food for two seconds, say 'OK' and give up the food.
 - (b) If the puppy touches your hand before the two seconds pass and before you say 'OK,' immediately yell 'off' loud enough to make the puppy back away without frightening it. Be dramatic, lean toward the pup, make eye contact, and give a forceful command.
 - (c) Repeat, gradually increasing the time the puppy has to wait.
3. Once the pup learns to back away from food on command, practice the above exercise using only your hand. Later, repeat the exercise when the puppy is in more excited moods.
4. Work toward the puppy not taking food, or touching your hand, no matter how tasty the treat or how your hand is moving, once you have said 'off.'
5. You must practice every day to attain a dependable response.