



*Let's talk about...*

# Puppy biting/ mouthing

## Why do puppies mouth and bite?

Puppies like to explore the world with their mouths, which makes everything a potential chew toy (including your skin). This upsets many owners; puppy teeth can really hurt! It is especially distressing if you have children, who can become quickly scared.

Providing a safe environment to prevent inappropriate chewing on household items, and teaching your puppy bite inhibition from an early age will help prevent unwanted behaviours as they grow.

## What is the breed?

All puppies are susceptible to biting/ mouthing although it is more evident in certain breeds, particularly those bred to use their mouths.

- Retrieving breeds “mouth” considerably as they are bred to pick up things with their mouth.
- Terriers are bred to kill vermin. If you squeak when a terrier mouths you, they get very excited at the sound of a “kill”.
- Guarding breeds practise adult behaviours through mouthing, as biting is their job.

## Things to consider:

- **Is the puppy tired?** *A tired puppy becomes irritable therefore is likely to mouth more. Puppies need around 18-20 hours sleep in 24 hours.*
- **Is the puppy bored?** *If the puppy isn't getting enough mental stimulation, they can mouth more for something to do.*
- **Has the puppy been on their own for hours?** *The puppy may be so relieved to see you on your return they become over excited, and due to limited self-control can't help biting.*
- **Does the puppy not want to be touched?** *Watch to see when the puppy mouths you. If it is always when touched this could be a gentle warning. The puppy may be tired or sore, being handled too much or too roughly. Alternatively, the puppy may have an aloof or independent personality. A trainer can assist with this and help you develop a better bond with the puppy.*





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- **Is the puppy asking for something (e.g. going out to potty)?** *A puppy can become frustrated if you don't notice what they are attempting to communicate and resort to mouthing. A trainer can educate you how to read canine body language.*
- **Does the puppy have an ear infection?** *This can lead to excessive mouthing to help alleviate discomfort.*
- **Is the puppy being defensive?** *Have you just told them off sternly and then tried to pick them up? This kind of mouthing is not play. Although they may lack confidence for a full bite, they could be working up to that.*
- **Are you trying to do too much with your puppy?** *Do not over train your puppy as they can't cope. They should be emotionally learning at this stage. Over stimulated puppies can bite through frustration.*
- **Is the puppy teething?** *At this stage puppies can mouth to bring relief to sore gums.*

## How to stop biting/ mouthing

- Teach your puppy that mouthing or nipping skin or clothes at any time stops play and attention immediately:
  - When your puppy nips, get up and walk out of the room for a short time.
  - Come back in and resume play and attention.
  - If your puppy mouths again, play stops again. If they do not, the game and attention continues.
- Give your puppy appropriate toys to keep them entertained and redirect mouthing onto something appropriate.
- Puppies love to seek, grab, play, and pull. This play is great bonding and will also help break the mouthing habit.
- By using a rubber toy stuffed with puppy-appropriate food, you are turning a mouthing puppy into a dog that is playing with you *through* the toy.
- Expect a second chewing phase around the 6-9 month adolescence period.





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- Hand feeding your puppy its food will help enormously.
- You do not want mouthing to continue into adulthood. A mouthing puppy is much more manageable than a mouthing adult dog. This habit is difficult to break in adulthood, and the bites can be much more painful!
- Mouthing is not an easy habit to break. It is important to find what motivates your puppy (praise, toys, treats, or a combination).
- Once you find the right motivator, you may find your puppy is happy to redirect their mouthing elsewhere.

## What Not to Do:

- Avoid playing roughly with your puppy. Encouraging roughhousing at a young age will quickly leave you with an adult dog with a major mouthing problem.
- Do not just tell your puppy "no" when mouthing. Even negative attention is still attention and will not successfully discourage the mouthing. Get up and walk away instead.

## Links

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JR11FhIBeKc>

<https://youtu.be/3dMKR5i9iNQ>

