

Teething- Land sharks!

Puppies bite because they are teething and learning to control their bite strength, and because nipping is a way to explore and join the social life of dogs. Another reason puppies bite is because it makes exciting things happen; biting earns attention.

Biting for the reaction usually happens after the puppy enters its "forever home." The typical scene is where the family is quiet, relaxing after a long day. Everyone is ignoring the puppy....

The bored puppy muses, "How can I get this party started?" Biting often works to get attention, so the puppy zooms around the room leaving a wake of chewed laces and bitten toes in its path. Ignored no longer, now the entire family is looking at and touching the puppy, and "barking" with excitement (yelling at the puppy). Every family member has put aside what was previously interesting in order to focus on the puppy. Mission accomplished—the party has started! Puppies are very good at training humans to pay attention to them.

Here are things you can do to ensure that your dog develops appropriate "mouth manners.":

DO Reserve your spot in a well-taught puppy class before you even bring home your puppy!

DO make sure that you have plenty of chew toys on hand—pressed rawhide, bully sticks, Nylabones, frozen stuffed Kong products, or even old washcloths soaked in water and frozen are all great treats. Supervise your puppy when he is enjoying his toys.

DO hand-feed your dog. Hand-feeding is a great way to improve your bond with your dog, and it offers you lots of opportunities to practice rewarding him for using his mouth politely! Hand-feeding also teaches the dog that you are a very exciting and rewarding person to spend time with—a bonus! Other family members should practice hand-feeding; encourage guests to hand-feed the dog as well. Of course, small children should not feed nippy puppies by hand. If there are elderly individuals in the home, they should practice this exercise last or wear light gardening gloves when practicing the initial stages of training. Since skin tends to thin as people age, there is a greater likelihood of puncturing.

DO manage and redirect. Crates and tethers are valuable management tools. You do not want to associate crate time with **punishment**, so when your puppy needs to go in the crate to relax for a bit, offer one of the chew toys you have prepared. Doing so allows you to redirect your puppy's teething instincts to an appropriate outlet. If you are using a tether, make sure that your puppy is securely attached in an area that has been puppy-proofed. Neither the crate nor the tether area should make the dog feel socially isolated (keep both in a living area).

DO set up play dates with appropriate puppies and tolerant, well-socialized adult dogs. Read up on canine body language and stress signals, and how and when to intervene if play gets out of hand.

DO make sure your puppy is receiving adequate physical and mental stimulation. Sometimes, puppies bite because they are bored and it's something to do. If it makes people scream, run, and otherwise "freak out" as well, it's a real party starter for a brassy young pup just looking for a good time. Physical exercise and mental stimulation alone will not eliminate the nipping (maturity and training, however, will), but both can often reduce the frequency and intensity of mouthing behaviour.

DO learn to "Be a Tree." You hardly ever see dogs chasing, nipping, or biting at trees. Why? Because they're boring—they don't move, squeal, run away, scream, give eye contact, or push the dog away. Trees are just there. "Be a Tree" is a technique that all family members should learn, but it is especially wonderful to teach small children.

Do ensure if your puppy bites your hand hard during any of your training exercises, stand up, turn your back on the dog, and walk away or "Be a Tree."