



Mouthing & Nipping

The Importance of Bite Inhibition

- Dogs use their mouths to explore the world much like we use our hands. The puppy biting phase will typically end around 6-8 months of age.
- While it is a normal puppy behavior to mouth and nip, we need to communicate to them that it is not ok to bite human skin so that they can develop what we call bite inhibition.
- Bite inhibition is when the dog learns how to be gentle with their mouth. Through feedback from us they can learn how to do this.
- We want them to understand early on in life that they must be gentle when it comes to human skin. Things like playing with toys we hold, taking treats, playing with other dogs, etc. all involve their open mouth. It's vital we teach them how gentle they should be.
- If you've ever seen two dogs get into a scuffle that sounds terribly vicious but the only result afterwards is some wet fur, that is a perfect example of bite inhibition. If the dogs wanted to they certainly could have caused serious damage, but they are able to restrain themselves because they have developed bite inhibition.
- Puppies get their first lesson of bite inhibition with their littermates. When a puppy bites their sibling a little too hard the dog will squeal to communicate "ouch that hurt" and the puppy learns they have to be a bit softer next time.
- Puppies have to learn this same lesson from us. With much stricter rules of course. We can communicate to them that their mouth hurts us by using a similar method that their littermates use.

How to Handle Puppy Nipping

- If your puppy nips you, squeal a dramatic "OUCH" and then turn away from them, become completely still, and remove all of your attention for 30 seconds.



- This method is how we communicate that what they just did hurt us. We are freezing and removing all of our attention because this causes them to consider what they just did.
- After 30 seconds you can engage with your puppy again and ask for a sit, then redirect them to bite something appropriate like a stuffed animal or tug toy. Praise and reward them for doing these behaviors.
- If your puppy ignores your “OUCH” when they bite you, then completely remove your attention by leaving the room. After a minute, return and engage with them again by asking for a sit and then rewarding them with attention and toys. Repeat this pattern.
- Trust in the process. If you are inconsistent with your response, they will be inconsistent with theirs. You always want to be sending a clear message that biting is not ok. This lesson will take many repetitions but over time your puppy will learn that when they bite all the fun stops, and they will begin to be more careful with their mouth.

Bite Inhibition with Other Dogs

- While it is important for dogs to have bite inhibition with humans, it’s also crucial for them to develop bite inhibition with other dogs.
- Dogs commonly learn this through “play fighting” with other dogs. Play fighting is how dogs teach other dogs the appropriate level of bite. Dogs are able to handle a much stronger bite than humans but it still needs to be controlled so that it doesn’t harm the other dog.
- Puppies may be given “corrections” from more mature dogs if they bite too hard. These “corrections” which may be a growl or snap, are the mature dog's way of communicating that was not an appropriate bite to the puppy.
- Although it may be startling to see this happen to your dog, it is actually extremely important that it does happen. THIS is how your puppy learns what is acceptable play behavior with their doggy playmates.
- Dogs who are not taught how to inhibit their bite can land themselves in dangerous situations. Handling their mouthing properly and giving them many opportunities to learn acceptable play behavior with other dogs is vital to their development.