



Managing Puppy Mouthing

Why do puppies bite?

Puppies are naturally curious creatures. They grab and chew with their mouths to learn more about the world around them. This behavior can lead to biting or chewing on undesired surfaces, including human skin!

Very young puppies will exhibit some form of mouthing behavior early in life. Once they reach 12-14 weeks, they start the teething process - replacing puppy teeth with adult ones.

Careful and consistent management and training can lead to a happier relationship and partnership with your puppy.

Management

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure!

Any interaction with your puppy is a potential teaching moment. With this in mind, let's learn about some management techniques to minimize or even prevent puppy mouthing behavior.

Any time you interact with your puppy, have a toy in hand or easily within reach. If or when your puppy decides to chew or bite you or your clothing, quickly try to redirect onto the toy. If your puppy has already made mouthing a routine, offer the toy at the start of the interaction, before the mouthing starts. Be ready to choose a different toy if your puppy continues to try to chew on you or your clothing. You may want to have 3-5 different toys within reach and with various textures.

Keep in mind that your puppy is chewing and biting to learn about the environment and although it can be uncomfortable or painful, avoid any verbal or physical reprimands. Remember, use this as a teaching moment and help your puppy to understand where it is ok to chew.

Another highly effective method involves the use of a baby gate or ex-pen. When your puppy starts mouthing your hands, feet or clothing and redirecting onto a toy is not working, simply step over a baby gate (or step out of the puppy ex-pen/ confinement area). Wait just long enough for your puppy to settle down before returning to play and interact. If the mouthing behavior starts again, repeat the process. With enough repetition, your puppy should learn that mouthing and biting make you go away and hopefully that chewing on toys is a better option.

How to hold and offer treats

Try this technique when offering treats during training sessions or simply because your puppy is being extra cute.

1. Place a treat in the palm of your hand
2. Cover the treat with your thumb
3. Present the treat
4. Move your thumb to allow access



This technique should make it easier to offer treats while avoiding sharp puppy teeth.

Behaviors that help to decrease puppy mouthing

Work on the following behaviors to encourage your puppy to interact with you without chewing or biting your hands.

Hand Target

Hold the palm of your hand near your puppy's face and wait for him to touch your palm with his nose. The moment he does, say "yes!" and offer a treat from your other hand. Do this a few times in a row, presenting the palm of your hand in a slightly different location each time. When your puppy seems to catch on, try adding the verbal cue "touch." Say "touch" just before presenting the palm of your hand to help him associate the word with the behavior.

Follow a food lure

Using the treat holding technique outlined above, hold a treat by your puppy's nose. Keep your thumb over the treat and slowly move your hand in any direction. When you stop moving your hand, move your thumb to allow access to the treat. Start with very short distances to encourage your puppy to follow along and gradually increase the distance over time.

Move your hand slowly and in a smooth motion to prevent your puppy from jumping up while following the food lure.