



## **Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals**

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### **Dealing With Normal Puppy Behavior: Nipping and Rough Play**

When puppies play with each other, they use their mouths. Therefore, puppies usually want to bite or "mouth" hands during play or when being petted. With puppies, this is rarely aggressive behavior, in which the intent is to do harm. Because puppies are highly motivated to exhibit this type of behavior, attempts to suppress it or stop it are unlikely to be successful unless you give your puppy an alternative behavior. The goals of working with this normal puppy behavior are to redirect your puppy's desire to put something in her mouth onto acceptable chew toys and to teach her to be gentle when a hand is in her mouth.

#### **Encourage Acceptable Behavior**

Redirect your puppy's chewing onto acceptable objects by offering her a small rawhide chew bone or other type of chew toy whenever you pet her. This technique can be especially effective when children want to pet her. As you or the child reaches out to scratch her behind the ears (not over the head) with one hand, offer the chew bone with the other. This will not only help your puppy learn that people and petting is wonderful, but will also keep her mouth busy while she's being petted. Alternate which hand does the petting and which one has the chew bone. At first, you may need to pet or scratch your puppy for short periods, since the longer she's petted, the more likely she is to get excited and start to nip.

#### **Discourage Unacceptable Behavior**

You must also teach your puppy to be gentle with hands, and that nipping results in unpleasant consequences for her. Teach your puppy that nipping "turns off" any attention and social interaction with you. After a nip, look your puppy right in the eye, and yell "OUCH" as though you've been mortally wounded, then ignore her. Leave the room if you must, but ignore her for 30 seconds, then try the chew bone and petting method again. When you put your puppy into a time-out by ignoring her or leaving the room, be sure to return after only 30 seconds. Longer time-outs may cause your puppy to forget why you left her or, even worse, give her opportunity to find new trouble. It may take many repetitions for her to understand what is expected, but when she realizes that being rude with her mouth ends the game, she'll likely tone things down.

A third alternative is to coat your hands with a substance with an unpleasant taste such as "Bitter Apple." In this way, your puppy will learn that "hands in mouth taste bad." For this method to work, every time she nips your hand she must experience this bad taste. The possible disadvantage to this method is that your puppy may learn not to like having your hands near her face.

Remember that any of these methods will probably not be effective unless you work hard to teach your puppy the right behavior by offering her an acceptable chew toy.

## **Jumping Up**

When your puppy jumps up on you, she wants attention. Whether you push her away, knee her in the chest or step on her hind legs, she being rewarded for jumping up (even though it's negative attention, she's still getting what she wants).

### **When Your Puppy Jumps Up:**

- Silently, but abruptly, turn away as soon as paws leave the ground.
- Begin approaching her again after a moment (calmly and quietly, to give her every chance of success). When she is able to respond to your approach with all four paws on the floor, praise her and give her a high value treat.
- When she is reliably standing with all four paws on the floor on each approach, approach her again and wait patiently until she sits. Don't command her to sit, you want her to automatically sit when you approach. If you are very patient, eventually she will get bored and sit. At the moment that her rear touches the ground, praise her and treat her generously.
- As you repeat your approaches, it will take less and less time for your puppy to automatically sit down. When she is sitting immediately upon your approach, you can try being more exciting when you approach her, talking quietly to her and making the temptation to jump just slightly higher.
- Remember to go through this process with lots of different people, so that your puppy learns to sit down whenever anyone approaches her.

When your puppy realizes that she get no attention from you while she's jumping up, but does get attention when she stops jumping up and sits, she'll stop jumping up. Remember, once you've taught her to come and sit quietly, for attention, you **must** reward her behavior. Be careful not to ignore her when she comes and sits politely, waiting for your attention.

### **What Not To Do**

Attempts to tap, slap, or hit your puppy in the face for nipping or jumping up are almost guaranteed to backfire. Several things may happen, depending on your puppy's temperament and the severity of the correction:

- ▶ She could become "hand-shy" and cringe or cower whenever a hand comes towards her face.
- ▶ She could become afraid of you and refuse to come or approach you at all.
- ▶ She could respond in a defensive manner and attempt to bite you to defend herself.
- ▶ She could interpret a mild slap as an invitation to play, causing her to become more excited and even more likely to nip.

### **A Note About Children and Puppies**

It is very difficult for children under eight or nine to practice the kind of behavior modification outlined here. Children's first reaction to being nipped or mouthed by a puppy is to push the puppy away with their hands and arms. This can be interpreted by the puppy as play and will probably cause the puppy to nip and mouth even more. Dogs should never be left alone with children under ten and parents should monitor closely all interactions between their children and dogs.