

TIPS TO PREVENT CHEWING AND BITING IN PUPPIES

Puppies naturally explore the world with their mouths. The tastes and textures of objects in their environment help them to learn about their surroundings. They spend several months shedding their baby teeth and growing in their adult teeth. This stimulates them to chew and, thus, it is normal for them to chew. However, what puppies must learn is those things that are appropriate for them to chew on and those things that aren't.

The most important learning period for puppies occurs between the ages of 4 and 16 weeks. From birth to about 8 weeks, a puppy is mostly learning from his mother and littermates. The pup should also have generous amounts of gentle human handling during this time as this will help to prepare him for his new home.

A new puppy should not have free rein of the house at first as this could be too confusing for him. Keep him mostly in a smaller, easily cleaned room such as the laundry, garage or enclosed patio. Give him acceptable chew toys such as Kong toys and rawhides.

Your puppy will need chew toys that outlast his teeth and others that he can really get his teeth into. Add some squeaky toys, balls, tug-o-ropes, and whatever else you think your pup will enjoy that won't hurt him. Have about a dozen or so and alternate 3 or 4 each week so he doesn't get bored. A weak beef soup broth frozen inside a Kong can keep him engrossed for hours. Also try brisket or soup bones, but make sure they are raw, never cooked.

Do not give him discarded shoes or clothing as he cannot differentiate between old and new clothing, and may take an unwelcome liking to your good shoes or laundry hanging on the line. Never strike or yell at your pup during this time because you will only frighten and confuse him and could create unwanted aggression.



If your puppy chews on you or your clothing, make a loud noise, such as 'uh-uh!' to get his attention, then remove whatever it is that he's chewing on. Promptly replace it with an appropriate toy for him to chew on and reward him when he does. You can also use this method if he takes a liking to furniture legs. There are also bitter-tasting products available from pet shops or vets that you could try eg Mensa Fooey or Stop Chew.

Although often thought to be a teething behaviour, nipping, mouthing and biting in young dogs is generally a form of social play. Teething is more likely to involve gnawing or chewing on household objects. The first thing you must do is to provide your puppy with ample opportunity for play without biting.

Social play with people could involve chase and retrieve games, as well as walks or short runs. Be cautious of running too much so as not to damage young joints, and never during the heat of the day. It is wise to wait until the pup is at least 18 months old before taking him on longer runs. Although

wrestling and tug of war games can be fun, they may lead to play that is too rough or rambunctious (refer to Good Games Bad Games handout). Puppies need to learn bite inhibition. This is something they start to learn while with they are littermates, and is one reason puppies should not go to new homes until they are 8 weeks old so they have had time to practice social skills with other dogs. It can therefore be extremely beneficial for the puppy to have regular, supervised interactive social play periods with other dogs or puppies in the home or in the neighbourhood.

There are many reasons why dogs gradually or sometimes suddenly become aggressive. It is always frustrating and sad because it usually means the demise of the dog. A dog that is repeatedly biting, leaving bite marks or drawing blood, must, for the safety of others, be confined, muzzled, or sometimes even put down.

One cause of aggressive biting is pain. For example, a dog may bite if touched where there is a growing tumour. He may bite if he has a severe case of indigestion or a bladder blockage. If you suspect pain as the cause, see your veterinarian immediately.

There are at least two normal causes of aggressive biting. One is maternal protection of pups by the mum, and another is inter-female or inter-male rivalry. Here, the best advice is to properly socialize your dog at a very early age to people as well as to other dogs. Sometimes hormonal medication will effectively treat the aggression in these dogs.

Provide your dog with adequate play, attention and exercise, and you can turn the training to bite inhibition. One of the things that puppies need to learn is the amount of pressure from their jaws that causes pain. Without this feedback, a puppy does not learn to inhibit the force of his bite. Because all dogs can and will bite at some time, this lesson is vital for human safety.

Remember that play biting is a component of play behaviour in puppies. Play is a form of social interaction. Realize that your puppy is trying to play with you even though the behaviour is rough. To ensure that you are in control, be certain that each play session is initiated by you and not the puppy and that you can end each session whenever you choose. One effective strategy when the play gets too rough is to immediately end the play session and leave.

Social withdrawal can be a very powerful tool. Leave the puppy alone long enough to calm down. If, upon your return, the wild playing begins again, leave again. Although it is tempting to pick the puppy up and take him out of the room, this interaction may be interpreted by your puppy as additional play and the biting may continue as you carry the puppy to a confinement location.

