

## **Your Nipping Puppy**

Congratulations on your new puppy! In order to ensure that your puppy remains happy and healthy in his new home, it is important that you begin proper socialization from the start. One common issue that often arises is puppy nipping – while it may seem cute when your puppy is little, without proper training it can progress to unsafe and even destructive behavior. Fortunately, with the right attitude and a little bit of knowledge, this behavior is easy to remedy.

Why do puppies nip? From a very young age, a puppy's mouth is his main tool in his exploration of every aspect of the world. Because of this, many people find that their puppy will also nip in greeting or when playing. Although puppies are energetic and easily excitable, this behavior is generally not intended to be aggressive or harmful. However, while it can be tempting to allow this behavior to continue, failure to channel the puppy's behavior into a more suitable outlet (i.e. chewing on a dog toy) may result in continuation of this inappropriate behavior and progression to aggressive behaviors down the road.

### **When your puppy nips:**

#### **1. Redirect and reward acceptable behavior:**

Redirect your puppy's attention: Give your puppy chew toys, treats, or rawhides whenever you pet him. You also want to make sure to praise him when he is playing appropriately. This will ensure that you are keeping your puppy's nippy mouth occupied while positively reinforcing him. Start slowly and try to keep excitement to a minimum while you are praising him so that he will be less inclined to start the nipping behavior.

#### **2. Discourage naughty nipping behavior but DO NOT PUNISH:**

- All members of the family should use the same method when teaching your puppy new behaviors. In addition, be consistent and patient and try not to get frustrated if this does not 'cure' your puppy the first few times. Eventually, your puppy will choose your attention and cease the nipping behavior. Remember: Nipping = NO RESPONSE!
- Your puppy needs to learn to be gentle with you. If your puppy starts to get mouthy then immediately "turn off" any attention or social interaction, by crossing your arms and looking away. You can also try crying "OUCH" in a HIGH pitched voice. Ignore him until he is calm and then approach him with chew toys. This requires that you plan ahead of time and have toys readily available.
- If the 'no response' method does not work, then an alternative is walking completely out of the room within 1-2 seconds of the unacceptable behavior. Choose whichever method ultimately works for you, but remember to act immediately so your puppy understands the difference between wanted and unwanted behavior.
- Watch the level of play! If your puppy is getting increasingly aroused, then STOP play for a few seconds and then give him a toy. This technique will prevent your puppy from reaching the excitement level of play where he starts the nipping behavior – by preventing this escalation you are successfully preventing this intolerable behavior.
- Another great option that is highly recommended in addition to the above suggestions is to enroll your puppy in Puppy Preschool – these classes provide an ideal avenue to introduce both you and your puppy to the most modern and humane ways to socialize your puppy to be a valuable member of the family!

## What NOT to do:

- NEVER punish your puppy by hitting, slapping, flicking on the nose, putting fingers down his throat, pinching lips, kicking, or any other physical means, as this will NOT solve the nipping problem. Punishment such as this will only make the problem worse and will instead encourage fear or aggressive behavior in your puppy. Plus punishment may escalate the very problem you are trying to avoid.
- Avoid rough play – this means never play tug-of-war, wrestle with your puppy or allow him to grab your clothes if he is prone to nipping. Games such as this will further promote the very problem you are trying to resolve. Minimize inappropriate behavior and teach your puppy calm behavior. Remember that the focus should be on rewarding acceptable behaviors rather than punishing unacceptable ones.

## Things to think about:

- Understanding the underlying cause of aggression is important in developing a plan to prevent it from occurring. While most 'puppy aggression' is play-related nipping or biting that can be addressed with the above methods, more serious underlying problems are possible. The first step in addressing these problems is being able to recognize them so that you can seek advice. Other forms of aggression include human or dog-directed aggression that may be based in fear, dominance, territoriality, predatory or pain-related motivations.
- Signs to look for include specific body language and vocalizations. For example, if your puppy's ears are pointed towards you and his tail is up, then that may be a sign of confident aggression. In contrast, if his ears are laying flat against his head and his tail is tucked under, then that may be a sign of fear and anxiety. Some puppy nipping is not playful, but true aggression. You want to avoid escalation of the problem by seeking immediate advice from your local veterinarian.

## When to see your vet:

If you continue to experience problems with your puppy or have any questions related to your puppy's health or behavior, do not hesitate to contact your local veterinarian for guidance and management solutions. Again, congratulations on your new puppy and enjoy the many years of joy and happiness this new furry companion will bring to you and your family!

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