

Help! My Puppy is Biting!



While it won't heal those punctures on your hands and ankles any faster, it may be comforting to know that if your puppy is biting you are not alone. Mouthing and biting are normal (but not desirable) behaviors and essentially all puppies will bite. The good news is that as your puppy gets older much of the nipping and mouthing will disappear, particularly if you don't encourage it through aggressive play. Fortunately, most biting done by puppies is playful and there are several ways you can discourage your puppy from choosing you as a target.

- **Avoid aggressive play.** Tug-of-war, wrestling and boxing at the puppy's mouth with your hands will get your puppy excited and teach her that hands are appropriate chew toys.
- **Redirect the puppy to appropriate toys.** Virtually all puppies will need to chew on something, so make sure there are plenty of acceptable chew toys available. If your puppy attacks your hand, ankle or clothing, offer him a favorite toy instead. When he goes for the toy give him lots of praise and attention.
- **Practice the high yip.** When play between puppies get too rough the one being bitten will give a high-pitched, piercing yip. This will startle most puppies and cause them to stop biting for a moment. You can mimic the high yip, then withdraw your hand and substitute something else.
- **Use a Gentle Leader collar.** The Gentle Leader gives you an effective way to control a puppy's head and mouth. If your puppy starts to go for a hand, pull gently and steadily on the lead. As soon as he stops release the pressure and praise him,
- **Keep your fingers curled.** Many puppies will not bite at a closed fist as they will an open hand.
- **Use time-out.** If your puppy gets too riled up, won't listen to you, and immediately starts to bite again after you've tried some other approaches, then isolating her for a brief period may be needed.
- **Supervise play between kids and puppies.** Many children are not able to use these techniques on their own and will need your help. Puppies learn quickly and may discover that young children can be intimidated by rough play and biting. Kids also like to do things that get puppies overexcited. Adult supervision will be needed until the puppy *and* the child learn how to play appropriately.