

# Living With Dogs

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## Puppy Nipping & Mouthing

Puppies are teething until they're about 6 months old, which usually creates some discomfort. It can take up to 4 months after the puppy teeth are lost for the adult teeth to mature. Chewing not only facilitates teething, but also makes sore gums feel better. Although it's perfectly normal for a puppy to chew on furniture, shoes, shrubbery and such, these behaviors can be a problem for you. A puppy won't magically "outgrow" these behaviors as he matures. Instead, you must shape your puppy's behaviors and teach him which ones are acceptable and which aren't.

### Encourage Acceptable Behavior

Redirect your puppy's chewing onto acceptable objects by offering her a small chew bone or toy whenever you pet her. This technique can be especially effective when children want to pet her. As you or the child reach 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 are 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.

### Discourage Unacceptable Behavior

- Puppy proof your home – pick up the socks and valuables and close the doors of the rooms where puppy should not wander. Baby gates can be very helpful in managing puppy's access.
- Don't give your puppy objects to play with such as old socks, old shoes or old children's toys that closely resemble items that are off-limits. Puppies can't tell the difference!
- You must 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 and remain aloof without eye contact. Leave the room or put the pup in a crate or on a tie out, if you must, but ignore her until she's calm, then try the chew bone and petting method again. It's even better if you can coax your puppy into a sitting position using food. It may take many repetitions for her to understand what's expected.
- If the puppy bites your feet, shoes or clothing yelp and freeze then remain aloof for a few minutes.
- Hold still or gently push your hand into the puppy's mouth rather than retracting it. When an object or critter moves away from a dog quickly they naturally key into that motion and their instinct is to chase it.
- Pat the top of your puppy's head repeatedly while the pup is nipping. Generally they do not like being patted on the top of their head and the pup will eventually turn away.
- You can also put your finger gently over the top of the bridge of her nose for a few seconds. A moma dog will often gently take the pup's muzzles in her mouth for a short time to let them know when she has had enough or to teach bite inhibition.
- Nipping and mouthing hands can also be discouraged by loosely holding your puppy's lower jaw between your thumb and forefinger after she's taken your hand in her mouth. Don't hurt her by squeezing too hard, just gently hang on so that wherever her mouth goes, your hand hangs on. This will quickly become tiresome and she'll eventually pull away. After several seconds, release her jaw, but continue to offer her your hand. If she licks or ignores it, praise, pet and offer a tidbit. If she closes her mouth on your hand again, repeat the procedure.
- Another alternative is to wear cotton gloves coated 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 "hands with gloves taste bad and those without gloves don't.
- 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.