



Paw Prints

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Columnist

What to do about puppy mouthing

Your friend's 5-month-old puppy is adorable and getting really big. But every time you visit them you end up with chew marks and spit on your hands, arms and clothing. How do you tell your friend that it's just not that cute anymore?

It's normal behavior for puppies to spend a great deal of time playing, chewing and investigating objects with their mouths. And when puppies play with people, they often nip, chew and mouth on people's hands, limbs and clothing. This kind of behavior may seem cute when your little furry friend is eight weeks old, but it's not so endearing when baby Rover's four or five months old — and getting bigger by

the day!

It's important to help your puppy learn to curb his mouthy behavior. The ultimate goal is to train your little furry friend to stop mouthing and biting people altogether.

If you watch a group of puppies playing, you'll see plenty of chasing, pouncing and wrestling. Puppies also bite each other all over. Every now and then, a puppy will bite his playmate too hard. Then the victim of the painful bite yelps and usually stops playing. The offender is often taken aback by the yelp and also stops playing for a moment. However, pretty soon, both playmates are back in the game.

With this kind of interaction, puppies are learning to control the intensity of their bites so that no one gets hurt. If puppies can learn how to be gentle from each other, they can also learn the same lesson from people.

Although you can teach your puppy to be gentle when nipping and mouthing you, you need to teach your puppy that teeth don't belong on human skin, period.

First, make sure you're not encouraging baby Rover to be mouthy by playing roughly with him. This over-excitement could cause him to see your hands as something to chase and catch with

his teeth.

When your puppy chews on your hands and arm say a firm, "Ouch!" or even fake a dog yelp, and then back away and stop playing for a while. This is how dogs in the wild know when they've gone too far.

When you start to play with baby Rover again, redirect his attention. Grab one of his dog toys such as a hard rubber ball or chew bone and show it to him. When he goes for his toy praise him while he chews on it, your praise tells him that what he is chewing on now is the right thing, and that human skin is the wrong thing.

If he doesn't go for the toy, walk away for a while.

Since puppies have short attention spans, they sometimes forget corrective behavior, so you might find yourself repeating the actions you just taught him many times. However, with consistency and patience, he'll eventually understand.

Remember that consistency is the key. Give baby Rover crystal-clear feedback all the time so he can learn what you want him to do. Being consistent in redirecting your puppy from fingers to dog toys will help him learn that human skin is not acceptable, but that his ball or chew toy are OK.

Here are some tips to



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Puppy can be redirected with a chew toy.

follow when training your puppy not to mouth your hands, arms, toes or clothing:

- Substitute a toy or chew bone when baby Rover tries to gnaw on fingers, arms or toes.

- Puppies often mouth on people's hands when being petted and scratched. If your puppy gets all riled up when you pet him, distract him by feeding him small treats from your other hand. This will help your puppy get used to being touched without mouthing.

- Encourage non-contact forms of play also, such as fetch and tug-of-war, rather than wrestling and rough play with your hands.

- If baby Rover bites at your feet and ankles, carry his favorite tug toy in

your pocket. Whenever he ambushes you, instantly stop moving your feet. Take out the tug toy and wave it in front of him. When he grabs the toy, start moving again. If you don't happen to have the toy available, just freeze and wait for your puppy to stop nipping or mouthing you. The second he stops, praise him and get a toy to reward him.

- Provide plenty of interesting toys so that your little furry friend will play with them instead of gnawing on you or your clothing. And this includes gnawing on any of your visitors too!

If you believe that your puppy is too aggressive to train, you may have to seek advice from an experienced dog trainer or behaviorist.

Prevent a Litter, Fix Your Critter!



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