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Puppy Nipping Guide

Why Puppies Nip

Since puppies do not have hands, they use their mouths to explore the world around them. This usually results in everything going into their mouth at some point, including your shoelaces and your fingers. Also, puppies usually spend a lot of time mouthing and biting their littermates during play. This helps them learn about bite inhibition (the strength of their bite). If one puppy bites another one too hard, the puppy will probably yelp and stop playing with the other puppy. If this happens enough times consistently, the biter learns that they will need to apply less pressure in order to keep the play going. Unfortunately, this is not enough to teach young and growing puppies how to properly interact with us humans, leading to a lot of people getting nipped once they bring their puppy home.

Puppies aren't trying to be malicious when they nip you, most of the time they are simply trying to play and doing what they are instinctively programmed to do.

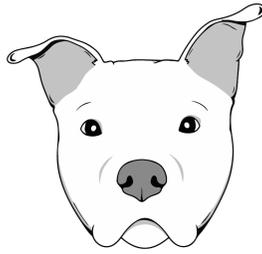
How to Properly Address Puppy Nipping

Handling puppy nipping is a simple process but simple doesn't mean easy! We must be consistent, prepared, and more importantly, keep our cool.

What You'll Need – Be Prepared!

Before we discuss proactive steps on this, it's important you first are prepared to set your puppy and yourself up for success. Having a few toys nearby is helpful and having treat stations (areas where you keep treats around the house for on-the-fly moments) is key. Having a leash handy or even better, having your puppy wear a light weight leash (when supervised) that they can drag around during peak nipping times is good too. Lastly, a play pen area for your puppy can be a great way to separate your puppy if needed when you cannot watch their every move or if the nipping is severe in certain moments that redirection may not work as effectively.

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Having all of this handy is really important to make sure that you can stay calm because you'll have options! It'll also help your puppy learn that there are better things to do than nip at people in the house.

Responding to Nipping

The general idea you want to teach your puppy is that when they nip at you that you will immediately stop interacting with them.

Example 1: You're sitting with your puppy and petting them when all of a sudden, they start to nip you. The moment the nipping begins, immediately stop petting. Bring your hands and arms in, stand up, stand still, and ignore your pup. You may even need to walk away for a moment or two until your puppy is calm.

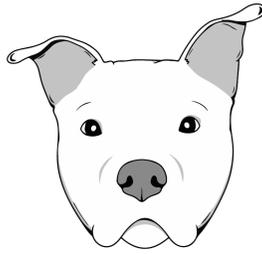
Example 2: You're playing tug with your dog and they slowly move up the toy and begin nipping at you or your clothes. When this happens, immediately drop the toy, stand up, arms in, and stand still. You can try re-engaging with play once your puppy is not nipping. Nipping = fun stops. No nipping = fun continues.

What to Avoid Doing

Avoid yelling at your puppy. They are only doing what is normal and natural for them. Yelling is only going to scare your puppy and break trust between you and them. And for some dogs, it may even drive them to get more hyper-stimulated or stressed and nip more.

Avoid holding your puppy's mouth closed. This will not only make your puppy very uncomfortable, but it usually leads to stress and fear with your hands coming towards their face. Again, this can also make them frustrated and nervous and cause more nipping.

Avoid tapping their butt, head, nose, etc. Physical punishment is never something you need to resort to. Not only does it not teach your puppy what you'd prefer, but it



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again, causes fear and stress – which is the opposite of what we want when building a relationship with our puppy.

Avoid screeching, running, lots of movement, and waving your hands around! It's understandable that for some of us, we may respond in this way. But unfortunately, you have now made this into a game and your puppy hears you squeaking and sees your erratic movements and hands waving as an invitation to play and get more over-stimulated.

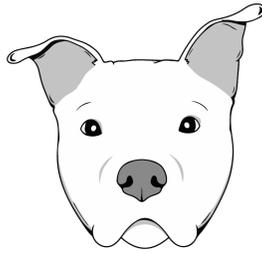
Avoid saying "no". Considering puppies don't know English, this is a lost cause. We always remind clients that "no" is not a behavior. Therefore, this won't work well with your puppy. Actions always speak louder than words for dogs – so go into some proactive action instead of focusing on "no".

Avoid loud yelping. You may have heard to yelp "eek!" or something of that nature when your puppy nips you. Although this isn't a super harmful thing to do overall, I have found over the years that it isn't very effective for behavior change and that most people do not apply the level of timing and consistency needing for it to truly benefit anything. I have also found that most people will unfortunately find themselves yelping *a lot*. So I recommend following the motto of actions speak louder than words here.

Avoid rough-housing with hands. This is counterproductive to our mission of decreasing/eliminating puppy nipping. If we want to teach a puppy to not use their mouths on us, then we need to not use our hands to play rough with them. Rough-housing and wrestling with puppies with our hands is in essence telling them "go for my hands!" You can still rough-house with your puppy (when appropriate) but instead, substitute a toy for your hands.

Nipping Puppies and Children

As hard as it is for your puppy to learn to quickly stop nipping, it's equally as hard for children to avoid running, squealing, dancing, waving their arms and hands, and accidentally encouraging the puppy to nip them.



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When your puppy nips at the kids, you can immediately tether your pup to a door knob or walk them out of reach of the kids. You can also bring your children out of reach from the puppy as well. This is why active supervision and proper management is crucial at this stage, especially when young children are around or living with the puppy. We want to be as eager about teaching the children how to properly interact with puppy as much as we are eager to train the puppy to not nip the children!

Remember, nipping = removal/people go away.

Movements away from the puppy must be immediate and smooth. Movements towards the puppy must be calm, purposeful, and soothing rather than excitable or unpredictable.

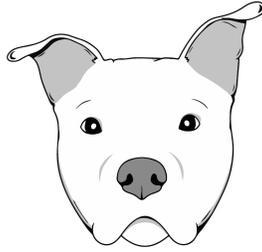
Bottom Line

If you do absolutely nothing, chances are your puppy will outgrow this stage on their own, but if you are consistent with the above protocols, chances are you will get their easier and get on the right track with your puppy sooner.

If your puppy nips, cease play, remove all attention (looking, talking, touching), and remove them or yourself for a few moments.

If your puppy nips, redirect immediately to a toy (preferably a novel toy to have them super interested right away). You can also redirect by using food to toss away from you for them to go get or to get them into “work” mode.

Be consistent, persistent, and patient. Reinforce calm behaviors with food, toys, play, affection, praise, and access and withdraw attention for mouthy behavior and you will survive your little land shark’s nipping phase with less holes in your clothes and less teeth marks on your body!



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For a full video on puppy nipping tips check out our video on our YouTube page at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lafd1NlkDWU&t=8s>.

- You can also listen to the tips on our podcast called The Dog Training Audio Experience: <https://anchor.fm/dogtrainingaudioex/episodes/Puppy-Nipping-Tips-ef8819/a-a1rrkgr>.

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