



DogSmith E-Book Series

Volume 2

Teaching a Puppy Good Mouth Behaviors

Don't let them bite the hand that feeds them!

Niki Tudge Master DogSmith



Don't Let Them Bite the Hand That Feeds Them

If you or your friends have a dog that still nips or bites inappropriately during play then you may have a “Bite School Drop Out” on your hands. Because most dogs are adopted into our homes as 8 week old puppies we take them from the “bite school” of their mother and siblings before they have learned important “bite inhibition” skills. So we have to pick up where mom left off and teach our puppies how to use their mouths appropriately.

Puppies explore the whole world with their mouths, they learn about sizes, shapes, textures and the pain they can inflict when they bite too hard. Puppy mouthing is cute when they have little pincers but when they reach 80 pounds and have big teeth even mouthing should not be acceptable. It will be hard to explain to friends that your 80 pound German Shepherd that puts its teeth on their daughter is ok because “our dog will not bite”. All dogs can bite and if pushed or threatened they will defend themselves by fleeing or biting. A dog that has learned appropriate bite inhibition however will cause little or no damage even if pushed to the extreme of biting.

But puppies need to bite and chew, especially when teething, so we must provide them with the correct things to bite and chew on. For example, it is not a good idea to give your puppy one of your old shoes to chew on. Your puppy does not understand the concept of ‘old.’ They do however know what a shoe is so shoes and other personal non-dog items of ours should be off limits.

Teaching a puppy not to mouth and not to bite are two different exercises. And we won't try to completely stop them from doing both right off the bat because then they may not learn about bite pressure if we do. It is more important and critical to their development that they learn what mouth pressure is acceptable and what is unacceptable. One of the best ways for puppies to learn

bite inhibition is to enroll them in a well run, safe puppy class where they can play and learn the fight and play rituals with their own kind. Dogs teach other dogs great lessons about bite inhibition so playing with other dogs is an important part of your puppy's education.

Bite inhibition Training

Puppies have to learn at a very early age that they cannot put their teeth onto our skin, clothing or body in any way. They have to be taught a soft mouth. Puppies learn to develop this soft mouth from their mother and siblings through feeding, play and mock fighting. In addition, children or adults inappropriately playing with small cute puppies often encourage biting and only when larger teeth grow in and/or the puppy's jaw strengthens does the biting suddenly become a problem if the dog has not learned bite inhibition.

The following are simple guidelines for owners when they have a puppy that is biting during petting or restraint. First we address the biting and then we can address the mouthing. While we address the biting the puppy can mouth, have a soft mouth, but they must not apply any pressure or cause pain. As soon as we have a good soft mouth then we can work toward eliminating the play mouthing with a leave it or off command. The goal is to teach the puppy that they cannot use their teeth to grasp, manipulate or gain control over a human hand or in fact any other item other than their toys.

How to Prevent Puppy Biting:

During play with the puppy if the puppy bites, applies pressure with their teeth, then you stop petting them. This teaches the puppy that biting ends the interaction. (This is assuming we have a normal puppy and not a puppy that is resistant to human contact of a normal nature).

- When petting the puppy and he is exploring and using his mouth, as soon as pressure is applied say 'OUCH'. If the puppy stops then lure them into a sit using a nice treat and reward them
- If 'ouch' does not do the job then you will have to create some false pain and associated noises. I recommend a high pitch yelp and pull back the hand. Remove yourself and stop interacting with the puppy. This is exactly what a puppy sibling would do if nipped too hard.
- Return after 30 seconds and continue playing. Your puppy will learn very quickly that nips stop the game and fun ends.
- Use the level, tone and pitch appropriate to get results, do not traumatize the puppy as this will make them hand shy.
- Do not allow the puppy to play bite anything other than toys. They cannot differentiate between your hands, your cloths and your furniture

Playing with a puppy that has a soft mouth is an important part of their development; they need to train their mouths to have bite inhibition. If we scare or punish them into stopping any mouth

contact at all then we have not done our jobs in teaching them and enabling them to develop good mouth control.

When puppy is only mouthing then we can teach them an '*off*' or '*leave it*' command to remove their mouth from us completely. That way they can mouth when they play but we can stop them if necessary.

- Hand feed the puppy using a large soft chewy treats you can hold in your hand
- As puppy is nibbling, remove your hand, if puppy comes to get the treat say '*off*' and close your hand.
- When puppy backs away, sits down or stops, reinforce and reintroduce the treat.

This teaches the puppy that mouthing is ok if we allow it and it teaches them that if they "off or leave" they will gain access to the treat.