

MOUTHING - (Puppy Biting)

contributed by Joel Walton Walton Family Dog Training
Prince Frederick, MD
Assoc. of Professional Humane Animal Trainers

If you watch a litter of puppies playing, you will notice that they spend much of their time biting and grabbing each other with their mouths. This is normal puppy behavior. When you take a puppy from the litter and into your home, the puppy will play bite and mouth you. This is normal behavior, but needs to be modified so you and the puppy will be happy.

The first thing to teach your new puppy is that human flesh is much more sensitive than other puppies and that it really hurts us when they bite. This is called bite inhibition. A puppy has very sharp teeth and a weak jaw. This means that the puppy can cause you to be uncomfortable when mouthing or puppy biting you, but can not cause severe damage. An adult dog has duller teeth and a powerful jaw. This means that an adult dog can cause significant damage when biting. **ANY DOG WILL BITE GIVEN THE RIGHT OR WRONG CIRCUMSTANCES !** If a small child falls on your adult dog and sticks a finger in the dog's eye, you should not be surprised if the dog bites. If you do a good job teaching your puppy bite inhibition, you should get a grab and release without damage. If you don't, you may get a hard bite with significant damage.

It is simple to teach a puppy bite inhibition. Every time the puppy touches you with its teeth, say "OUCH!" in a harsh tone of voice. This will probably not stop the puppy from mouthing, but over time should result in softer and gentler puppy biting.

The commands necessary to teach a puppy NOT to mouth, are easy and fun. Hold a small handful of the puppy's dry food, say "take it" in a sweet tone of voice, and give the puppy one piece of food. Then close the rest of the food in your hand and say "off" in that same sweet tone of voice. When the puppy has not touched your hand for 3 to 5 seconds, say "take it" and give the puppy one piece of food. We are teaching the puppy that "off" means not to touch. You should do this with the puppy before every meal for at least 5 minutes.