



Ouch! Pups that mouth and bite

HALL VETERINARY SURGERY BEHAVIOUR ADVICE



This is one of the most common complaints by puppy owners. Your puppy is a pack animal, within this pack biting or mouthing is a natural exploring behaviour. In play puppies will bite each other and learn to inhibit the depth of the bite so no pain is inflicted. Mouthing is an important learning phase for pups – they need to make mistakes and learn that play stops when they inflict pain. It is important for pups to learn to inhibit their bite while they still have their weak (but sharp) puppy teeth. If they have not learned to inhibit their bite when they have their adult teeth then serious dog bites can occur. This can cost a dog its life.



A MOUTHY, BITEY, NIPPY, PUPPY IS NORMAL.

WHY DO PUPS MOUTH AND BITE?

Mouthing is a normal exploratory behaviour in ALL pups driven by an instinctive need to:

- to develop strong jaw muscles and teeth necessary for survival in the wild,
- to explore and to learn about their physical environment,
- to learn the power of their bite and how to control it (bite inhibition).



TO STOP YOUR PUP BITING YOUR CLOTHES WHEN THEY GRAB HOLD, DON'T TUG BACK – REDIRECT ONTO A PUPPY TOY OR ANY NOVEL ITEM.

Puppies investigate everything they can with their mouths just like human babies. A puppy will chew just about anything. This is more likely to occur when the puppy is excited, particularly by movement. This means that the feet and hands of people are common targets. If immediately rewarded with attention, then the pup is more likely to behave that way again.

Puppies are teething from about three weeks to 5–6 months of age! When the puppy is teething, chewing on hard objects eg rawhide bones, raw carrots can help reduce their discomfort.

Human play activities often promote mouthing eg. if a child runs with the puppy this can lead to an instinctive chase and hunt response (part of hunting is biting your prey). Loose trousers, long flowing skirts, shoe laces and leads may all trigger the chase-and-bite instinct.

PREVENTION AND CURE

It is easiest to control the behaviour as soon as it starts by following a few basic rules:

- Start as you mean to continue, be consistent.
- Provide chew toys such as rawhides, raw carrots, pig's ears, etc.
- Put shoes, mobile phones, cables, pot plants etc out of reach.
- Avoid wearing loose flapping clothing or shoes while the pup is young.
- Teach children to be passive around puppies (aggression mostly leads to more aggression).
- Never tease or play roughly with a pup. Rough-house play between people and dogs is unacceptable as the pup cannot generalise and may try to rough-house elderly or very young visitors. No play with people hands and dog's mouth and equally importantly don't chase dogs as you may switch on the pup's predatory aggression.
- Have rules on all games—fetch the ball and 'give', sit for calm to tone the arousal level down, tug-of-war games should have a controlled 'give' command to lower arousal levels and keep games safe.



PUPS WILL CHEW ANYTHING LEFT LYING AROUND – SO PUPPY PROOF YOUR HOUSE!

OTHER TIPS

Puppies quickly learn to control their bite when they are playing with their litter-mates. When play becomes too rough, the highly pitched yelp of a sibling makes the 'biter' back off immediately. You can try and mimic this sound if your pup nips. This works for some people but not others as the pup might not hear the sound as credible and the squeaky yelp does the reverse and arouses the dog more. Time out works, just stop the game and time out the pup for a short time (no more than five minutes).

Punishing your pup for biting will only increase the aggression of a bold puppy and make a fearful pup even more timid. Just think how you react to physical pain! An alternative would be to take away something your pup likes, particularly your company. Offer alternatives such as toys, kongs, and rawhide chews. Praise your dog for chewing on these objects. Remember that old slippers may lead to chewing on new shoes!



IN SOME CASES MOUTHING BEHAVIOUR PARTICULARLY IN ADOLESCENT DOGS CAN BE A SIGN OF ANXIETY – SPEAK WITH OUR VET STAFF FOR ADVICE.

For advice about dog training and behaviour issues PHONE: 6230 2223 or EMAIL: behaviouradvice@hallvet.com.au