

Biting and Nipping

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Why Puppies Bite

Puppy biting is a normal developmental behaviour and usually has nothing to do with aggression. Instead, it's a mix of instinct, learning, and immature self-control.

One common reason puppies bite is overstimulation. When excitement levels rise too quickly during play or interaction, biting can become an outlet for that excess energy. Closely linked to this is overtiredness, just like children, puppies become more impulsive and less able to regulate their behaviour when they need rest.

Play itself is another major trigger. Puppies often become highly excited during social interaction, and that arousal can quickly tip into nipping or mouthing. In addition, movement is highly stimulating and can activate natural chasing instincts, leading them to grab at hands, clothing, or feet.

Puppies also bite because they have not yet fully learned bite inhibition i.e. the ability to control the pressure of their mouth. This is a skill typically developed through interactions with littermates and people.

Attention-seeking can also play a role. Even negative attention, such as shouting or reacting strongly, can unintentionally reinforce the behaviour.

For many puppies, any human interaction is rewarding enough to prompt them to repeat it (even if they were being told off - after all they don't speak human).

Finally, it's important to remember that in puppies, the parts of the brain responsible for impulse control and emotional regulation are still developing. As a result, once a puppy becomes highly aroused, they often struggle to calm themselves without help.

How to Teach a Puppy to Stop Biting

When your puppy bites too hard or grabs clothing, respond calmly and consistently. The goal is to remove reinforcement from the behaviour without creating fear or excitement.

The moment it happens, say a calm, neutral "Oh-No." This is not a punishment or a correction, but a marker signalling that the interaction is about to stop.

Immediately after, avoid reacting emotionally- no shouting, squealing, or physical punishment. Instead, calmly stand up and walk away. If needed, step behind a baby gate or leave the room for about 30 seconds. Keep quiet and unemotional.

This short pause interrupts the interaction, allowing arousal levels to drop and removing the reward of continued engagement. After 30 seconds, return calmly and resume what you were doing. If your puppy offers gentle behaviour, calmly acknowledge and praise it.

If the biting starts again straight away, repeat the process. Consistency is key - puppies learn through repetition, clear consequences, and predictable responses over time.