



Puppy Mouthing or Play-biting

Biting is one of the most common complaints made by owners of puppies. Puppies have needle-sharp teeth and seem to enjoy chewing on hands, arms, toes, pant legs, shirt sleeves and anything else they can get in their mouths. Just because your pup bites probably does not mean you have an aggressive or **bad** dog. It could simply mean you have a **normal** dog. Investigating things with their mouths is perfectly natural and normal for puppies.

There are some very simple steps you can take to teach your puppy exactly what is acceptable - and what is not. Before starting this exercise, make sure your puppy has a couple of good quality, acceptable toys. And remember: **Be Consistent**.

Preventing Puppy Mouthing

- Avoid putting your hands (toes, etc.) near your puppy's mouth or playing with him with your hands.
- Always play with an appropriate toy. This can be a ball, stuffed animal, squeaky toy, rope, or any other toy that your dog likes, and you approve of as a chew toy.
- If your puppy puts his mouth on you (even if it does not hurt) or grabs your clothes, give a loud, high-pitched "yelp!" or "ouch!" Make sure it's loud enough to distract the puppy and make him let go.
- As soon as the puppy is distracted (i.e. lets go of your fingers) **immediately** encourage him to play with one of his toys.
- Should he decide to grab your hand (foot, shirt, etc.) again, give another loud "ouch!" and again redirect his attention to a toy.
- Give lots of praise when the pup takes the toy in his mouth instead of your hand.
- For persistent "mouthers," when the puppy latches on to your hand, give a loud "ouch!" then turn and walk away, ignoring him. **Ignoring means do not pet, lecture, punish, talk to or even look at the pup!** He will probably follow you around. That's OK. Dogs are very social creatures who love to be near their people. Continue to ignore him, no matter how hard it is. After a few minutes of ignoring, try to play with him again with an appropriate toy. If he mouths you again, repeat the "yelp!" and ignore behavior.

Eventually, your puppy will get the idea that if he wants to play with you, he must keep his teeth to himself!

For more information about pet behavior and training, please **visit our website at michiganhumane.org**.