



## Puppies That Play Rough

While puppies are sweet and cuddly, they can go through naughty stages. From nipping behaviors to playing tug of war with the leash, puppyhood can seem like a nightmare! This article will help you teach your dog alternative behaviors.

A mouthy puppy may leash bites, grabs pant legs or even t-shirts. They may use their mouth to communicate with you! Puppies who become mouthy are typically not aggressive: they can be stressed, frustrated, may have never learned how to use their mouths appropriately, or may have received encouragement for this behavior. Many times this is their outlet for stress and frustration. Remaining calm and teaching the pup calming behaviors and a new behavior to get attention will create a brand new dog! Always remember, what you reinforce will be repeated. If the pup bites your pant leg and it results in a game of tug of war, the dog will continue to bite your pant leg! Some great reading resources about puppies:

Before You Get Your Puppy by Dr. Ian Dunbar

After You Get Your Puppy by Dr. Ian Dunbar

Puppy Primer by Patricia McConnell, PhD

Your Outta' Control Puppy by Teoti Anderson

Dunbar's Good Little Dog Book by Dr. Ian Dunbar



**Before the pup gets mouthy:**

- Reward ANY time the he is calm! This is not about telling the dog to do something. It is catching the dog doing something right and rewarding for it frequently. The more you reward, the more the dog will do that behavior. A great training exercise: For one minute, reward for anything and everything that is a calm good behavior, do not tell the dog to do anything. You can reward for eye contact, an automatic sit, having four paws on the ground, etc... When doing this exercise, the dog should receive at least ten treats in that minute! If food gets your dog excited, make sure the reward is low value, such as dog food.
- Pair play with calming/handling exercises: Start with a sit, then play for 15 seconds, then have the dog sit and give the dog a 30 second relaxing massage, then play again for 15 seconds. Repeat. This teaches the dog self-control. When you first begin the exercise, having the dog on leash will help. In addition to relaxing massage, handling options include: touching ears, paws, collar, tail etc..
- Puppy class that includes group play is a great way to tire your puppy out, teach him how about bite inhibition through play and bond with you! A good class will use positive training and socialize the pups at a pace they feel comfortable.
- Adult dogs can also be great “teachers”. Using a social older dog to teach your pup the ropes is beneficial.
- Work on teaching your puppy to relinquish items: Give the dog a toy and exchange it for the EXACT same toy. Repeatedly do trades. (If the dog views one toy as better than the other, it will not want to make trades) Another alternative is trading a toy for a treat.
- Giving your puppy a toy to put in their mouths while walking, playing or when they get excited.
- Use the leash as a lifeline. You can let allow the leash to drag so that you always have a way to control a situation if it escalates.
- Does your puppy have appropriate outlets for mental and physical exercise? Just like kids, a bored dog may resort to unruly behaviors. Substituting a frozen Kong for a meal fed from a bowl, short daily training sessions, toy puzzles, daily walks or jogs are all examples. Mental exercise is just as important, if not more as physical exercise.

#### **Too Late! The dog is being mouthy:**

- Stop and if possible stand on the leash, giving less than a foot, limiting how far the dog can go. The dog can now not jump at you. This also makes the leash neutral and prevents the game of tug of war! Note- ALWAYS make sure if you stand on the leash, if you are outside, that you are also holding the end of the leash to prevent any dogs from running away!!!
- Some dogs may still escalate and if that is the case, and you are comfortable handling your dog, drop the leash and hold onto the collar. This again, prevents tug of war game.
- Now toss a treat on the ground or put a treat near the dog’s nose and lure the dog into a sit. When the dog sits, walk one step and ask for another sit. Then begin the leash walking handout.
- If the puppy gets mouthy during play, give the dog a time out on leash by standing on the leash. When he is calm, practice having the dog sit a few times then allow the dog to play again.

- If the puppy continues to escalate, give the dog a timeout in their crate or other area that is small enough for them to have a “time out”. The crate is not the punishment, the lack of interaction with people is the punishment.

NOTE- If your puppy seems to be escalating in behavior, please contact one of our recommended trainers.

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