



Dog and Puppy Biting, Mouthing and Teething

by Gwen Bohnenkamp

Animal Behavior Specialist with Perfect Paws

Biting and mouthing is common in young puppies and dogs, especially in play and while teething. It's up to you to teach your puppy or dog what is acceptable and what is not.

Biting dogs are generally loving, sweet, adorable, affectionate and wonderful 99% of the time. Only 1% of the time does something specific happen that makes the dog bite. This article will discuss the causes of biting and what you can do to prevent your dog from biting.

Inhibit Biting

First of all, dogs must learn to inhibit their bite before they are 4 months old. Normally, they would learn this from their mother, their littermates and other members of the pack. But, because we take them away from this environment before this learning is completed, we must take over the training.

Socialization Prevents Biting

By allowing your puppy to socialize with other puppies and socialized dogs they can pick up where they left off. Puppies need to roll, tumble and play with each other. When they play, they bite each other everywhere and anywhere. This is where they learn to inhibit their biting and to control themselves. If they are too rough or rambunctious, they will find out because of how the other dogs and puppies react and interact with them. This is something that happens naturally and can only be learned from trial and error. There is nothing you can say or do to educate them in this realm.

Another major advantage of dog-to-dog socialization is that your dog can vent energy in an acceptable manner. Puppies that have other puppies to play with do not need to treat you like a littermate. So the amount of play biting on you and your family should dramatically decrease. Puppies that do not play with other puppies are generally much more hyperactive and destructive in the home.

Lack of Socialization Causes Biting

A major cause of biting is lack of socialization. Lack of socialization often results in fearful or aggressive behavior. The two major reactions a dog has to something it is afraid of are to avoid it or to act aggressive in an

attempt to make it go away. This is the most common cause of children being bitten. Dogs that are not socialized with children often end up biting them. The optimum time to socialize is before the dog reaches 4 months. With large breed dogs, 4 months may be too late, simply because at this age the puppy may already be too large for most mothers of young children to feel comfortable around. For most owners, the larger the dog, the more difficult it is to control, especially around children. If there is anything you do not want your dog to be afraid of or aggressive toward, you must begin to have them socialize 4 months old.

Trust and Respect Inhibits Biting

There are many other reasons your dog will bite and you will have to take an active role in teaching them. However, before you can teach your dog anything, there are two prerequisites that are essential: trust and respect. If your dog doesn't trust you, there is no reason why he should respect you. If your dog does not respect you, your relationship will be like two 5-year-olds bossing each other around. If your dog does not trust and respect you, then when you attempt to teach your dog something, he will regard you as if he were thinking, "Who do you think you are to tell me what to do?"

Use of Reprimands and Biting

Never hit, kick or slap your dog. This is the quickest way to erode the dog's trust in you. Yes, he will still love you. Even abused dogs love their owners. A unique characteristic of dogs is their unconditional love. You don't have to do anything to acquire your dog's love. But you must do a lot to gain your dog's trust and respect. Another area where we destroy our dog's trust in us is when we scold or punish them for housesoiling mistakes and accidents. When housetraining your puppy, there is never an appropriate time to punish or reprimand. If you catch your dog in the act, just head for the towels and cleaner. You have no right to scold him, because if he is going in the wrong place, it is your fault, not his. If you find an accident after the fact, just clean it up.

Summary Tips on Biting

1. Reprimand alone will never stop biting.
2. If there's no respect, the biting will get worse. Don't act like a littermate, or the dog may treat you as one.
3. If trust is not there, the dog may eventually bite out of fear or lack of confidence.
4. Inconsistency sabotages training. If you let the dog bite some of the time, then biting will never be completely eliminated.
5. Don't forget follow-up. The dog must understand that it is the biting you don't like, not the dog itself. Make up afterward, but on your terms, not his.

Gwen Bohnenkamp has been providing behavior consultation and training services since 1985. She instructed the first university-level course in Applied Animal Behavior at San Francisco State University and she established and directed the largest and most comprehensive animal behavior correction program in the United States at the San Francisco SPCA. For more information, please visit www.perfectpaws.com