

Puppy Nipping

It is normal for puppies to mouth you. They do it because they are teething and because they are exploring their world. But puppies are genetically programmed to learn that it is not okay. Mother nature set dogs up with a system to learn "bite inhibition" by giving puppies needle sharp teeth that hurt even with a small amount of pressure. Mom is the first to start teaching the puppy bite inhibition when she corrects her pups for biting her too hard. A mother's correction is timed perfectly, just the right amount of correction to make her point, and over very quickly. Littermates are next in line to continue the lesson of bite inhibition. During play, if one pup bites another too hard, the one who was bitten will scream and stop playing. So the biting puppy learns that all the fun stops if they bite too hard. With all of this great canine feedback, puppies start to learn bite inhibition. The problem is that we take them away from their mom and litter before they are done learning this important skill. So it is up to us to continue the lessons.

When your puppy puts his mouth on you, scream "OUCH" as though it hurt way more than it did and give him the cold shoulder for a few seconds. This is simulating the feedback the puppy would get from his littermates - "When you bite too hard, I scream, and stop playing". After a few seconds start playing again but try to direct your puppy's biting onto a toy instead of your hand. Repeat this procedure over and over until you notice he is biting less often. You will be teaching your puppy mouth self-control - or bite inhibition. After a few weeks of this your puppy should stop biting. Consistency is key!

Dragging leash (house line)

If your puppy is the type that either comes right back at you after you yell "ouch" or gets even more feisty - have him drag a light weight leash at all times (when you are home) and if he bites - say "OUCH - TIME OUT" and pick up the end of the leash and tether him to something like a table leg or door knob. Leave him tethered for about 30 seconds (or until he is quiet) and then untether him. Repeat this every time he bites.

Tethered play sessions

Another helpful procedure for mouthy puppies, especially if there are young children in the house, is to tether the puppy while you or the kids are interacting with him. As soon as he mouths you - scream "ouch" in a high pitched way and walk away from him. Stay away for 30 seconds (or until he quiets down if he throws a fit) and resume play with him using a toy.