

## Puppy Playbiting and Mouthing

Puppies normally play vigorously with the other puppies in their litter, usually mouthing and biting as a large part of this play behavior. When we remove puppies from their litter, this desire to play is often transferred to us.

Play biting can be distinguished from other types of biting by observing the body language of the pup. Play biting is often accompanied by a wagging tail, playful approaches and retreats, play bows (down in the front on their forearms with their rump in the air), and sometimes barking or growling in a playful, solicitous manner. It is usually obvious that the puppy wants you to play with him. The other thing that characterizes play biting is that, while they certainly may be painful or even break the skin, the bites are inhibited and not as hard as the puppy could bite if he wanted to bite hard.

If a puppy is playing with another puppy and becomes too rough with his bites, the other puppy will communicate this by yelping, growling, and/or withdrawing from the play. In this way a puppy learns to play gently or he is no longer able to play. You can use this information to teach your puppy not to bite by doing the following:

➤ **Provide your puppy with plenty of exercise.**

Often part of the problem that leads to play biting is that the puppy has more energy than he knows what to do with. He needs an outlet for some of that energy so it is not all directed into rough play behavior. Exercise can include time outside in the yard to run, chasing a ball, or going for a brisk walk or jog.

➤ **Never play tug-o-war, wrestling, or other rough games that excite the puppy and increase biting behavior.**

Replace these types of games with more calm, acceptable games, such as fetch the ball or catch the Frisbee.

➤ **When the puppy does bite, over-react to the bite with an exaggerated “ouch” or loud “no”, and temporarily withdraw from the puppy.**

You can then ask the puppy to perform an obedience command, direct him into a different form of play, or maybe give him a chew toy to redirect his attention away from biting and into a better activity. If the puppy refuses to be distracted and continues to bite, during or immediately following each bite grab the puppy by the skin under the chin, give a slight shake, and say “no bite” in a MEAN voice. Then attempt again to redirect the puppy’s attention into something else. You may have to be very persistent about correcting this way each time the puppy bites, until he finally decides that this is no longer a fun game.

Finally, be patient and realize that this is a playful behavior that does tend to get better as the puppy matures. If you are firm, fair, and consistent in discouraging play biting and teaching your puppy to play nicely, your puppy will soon learn how to play with you in a manner you will both enjoy.