

PUPPY BITING AND MOUTHING

Why do puppies bite and mouth?

Biting is normal! Puppies explore the world with their mouths. They tend to sniff, lick, mouth and chew new objects in order to investigate them. Natural puppy play also involves grabbing and biting, and it is also an effective way of getting their owners' attention. Puppies are stimulated by movement, so often grab at loose clothing such as scarves and flapping coats, as well as shoes when people are running. They tend to find children particularly irresistible because of their unpredictable movement and the fact that they shout and scream, which adds to the excitement of grabbing and biting their clothing and extremities.

When teething, puppies have an additional need to bite and chew to soothe their sore gums. This starts at around 3 months and all the adult teeth are in position by around 6 months.

Management strategies with children

All interactions between children and puppies should be supervised. Children sometimes handle puppies inappropriately and puppies can become over-excited when playing with children. It is advisable to install child-gates so that you can safely separate your puppy from your own children, or visiting children, if their play becomes too vigorous. It's important to give the puppy something rewarding while they are separated, such as a filled Kong or a chew, so he doesn't become frustrated when the game ends. You can encourage calm interactions by teaching the children how to hide some of the puppy's food around the house or garden and tell the puppy to "find it!" You can also involve the children in other aspects of the puppy's training.

How to deal with puppy biting

When playing with your puppy, make sure to have suitable toys on hand that he can grab, bite and shake. These should be soft and long, so you can hang onto one end while the pup grabs the other. You should move the toy in an exciting way to stimulate his interest. It can help to rotate the toys that are available to your puppy at any one time so he doesn't get bored with ones he can always access. If he grabs or bites your hand or other part of your body, you should keep still, and avoid looking at your puppy or saying anything to him. If he persists in grabbing you, you should leave the room for a short time. By withdrawing your attention in this way, you'll be teaching your puppy that biting is not rewarding. If you try to push your puppy away or tell him 'no', you will actually be giving him attention which will have the effect of encouraging the behaviour rather than stopping it (See also **PUPPY JUMPING UP**). If your pup is over-excited and the intensity of his play biting is increasing, he may be over-tired.

Over-tiredness

As with young children, the behaviour of puppies becomes more over-the-top when they are over-tired. Puppies require 15-20 hours of sleep per day. If you have a busy household, you'll need to organise quiet times for your pup to allow him to nap during the day. If he does reach the stage of being over-tired, rather like an over-tired child, he may be difficult to settle and may continue to grab and bite. It may be necessary to put him in his pen or crate, or on the other side of a child-gate, with something to chew to help him to relax while you sit beside him.