

Understanding Puppy Nipping

- Physical exercise
- Puppy playtime
- Human playtime
- Chew deterrents
- Shunning/Freezing/Yelping Techniques

DEFINITIONS

- Nipping - really quick bites with front teeth with a small amount of force. Often used when puppies are trying to initiate play or get attention. Also used when trying to herd animals, people, or toys (seen often in herding type dogs). Nipping can break the skin (especially with sharp puppy teeth!) and is not appropriate behavior to use on humans.
- Mouthing - open mouth play with a small amount of force. Dogs mouth each other all the time during play sessions, and as long as it remains relatively gentle, the other dogs rarely complain. If mouthing escalates in force and intensity, play should stop. I do not encourage mouthing during human play sessions since not all people appreciate that type of dog play. Also, if a dog is mouthy towards a child, they could unintentionally cause damage.
- Chewing - self soothing behavior where dog chews consistently on an object. This is really beneficial for dogs, both mentally and physically. It helps them calm down in stressful or exciting situations, helps through the teething phase, and helps with oral hygiene. Make sure dogs have appropriate items to chew on that are not edible and do not shred easily. Destructive chewing is a sign of boredom and anxiety, talk to Kelsey if your dog is exhibiting signs of destructive chewing.
- Teething - a development phase where the puppy is losing their baby teeth and the adult teeth are growing in. Teething can be stressful and painful for pups (and for owners!) and it is important to not punish puppies for trying to soothe themselves. Try offering frozen toys or softer chews to help your puppy cope with teething. You can also talk to your veterinarian about oral gels or other forms of pain relief for a teething puppy.
- Biting - dog uses whole mouth with enough force to cause harm. Dogs may bite to defend themselves, attack an enemy, injure an animal, relieve pressure, protest, or for a number of other reasons. We don't ever want to put a dog in a situation that causes them to bite. If a bite happens, the situation was not properly managed by the human. If puppies bite, it is generally because they have learned that it is a solution to a problem. Talk to Kelsey immediately if your dog or puppy is biting.

Remember puppies are like human babies in that they experience the world through their mouth; however, unlike babies, puppies use their mouths and teeth to communicate as well. It is our job to teach them what is appropriate and what is not.

PHYSICAL EXERCISE

- Make sure your pup is getting plenty of exercise throughout the day. Often, chewing/nipping happens when the pup is full of energy; regular exercise will help drain that pent up energy out of your pup before they take it out on your fingers.
- Things to consider about exercising a puppy:



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- Make sure you are exercising your pup within THEIR limits. Remember, they are a growing baby - over exercising can put a strain on developing joints and muscles.
- Exercise can involve running, jumping, playing games, walking, socializing, swimming, etc. Caution: don't take puppies on walks in public around other dogs until they have been vaccinated.
- Use exercise to **prevent** naughty behavior, not as a **response** to naughty behavior.
 - If your pup runs over and chomps on your shoe, don't respond by asking if they would like to go on a walk.
 - Instead, exercise your pup BEFORE they find their own outlet for their energy.

PUPPY PLAYTIME

- Puppy playtime is a crucial part of working through naughty nipping behaviors. Other puppies communicate with each other better than we humans can communicate with them (despite how hard we try!). When puppies play, they teach each other what is appropriate and what hurts.
- Watch puppies of similar play styles interact:
 - Play should be balanced
 - Both puppies should be positively engaged in the play session
 - If they are playing the chase game, make sure puppy being chased is having fun - not running for their life!
 - Play should be respectful
 - Some puppies mount each other during play. This is normal play behavior but not all dogs appreciate this and many owners are embarrassed by this behavior. If a puppy is mounting another dog repetitively, simply have them take a break for a minute.
 - Most puppies have no concept of personal space. If a puppy is getting constantly picked on or is trying to get a little distance from another puppy, have both puppies take a break.
- Puppies play with their mouths
 - When one pup bites another pup too hard, the pup receiving the bite will tell the other to stop. This usually happens with a yelp and is accompanied with body language that says "I didn't like that".
 - The puppy doing the biting should stop for a moment, as if to say "oops!".
 - Generally, play almost instantly continues back up - hopefully this time with less teeth or less force.
 - This interaction teaches puppies that if they bite too hard, play stops; if they play within the rules, play continues.
- The challenge with puppy playtime is finding other puppies that match your puppies play style. Dogs are like people: everyone has different social skills, enjoys different things, and communicates a little differently. Start out with puppies of similar size/breed, age, and energy level. Then, start expanding to different sizes and breeds. Next, have your dog interact with dogs of different ages and energy levels. You'll soon figure out the types of dogs your pup loves to play with and the ones that your pup doesn't communicate with as well.
- A note about puppies interacting with adult dogs:



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- Some adult dogs love puppies and some really don't. While it is nice to have an adult dog "teach your pup a thing or two", make sure that interactions are constructive.
 - If the adult dog lets the puppy do whatever they want and are too tolerant, pup may learn that other dogs don't have boundaries. This may not go over so well with a more defensive dog in the future.
 - If the adult dog over corrects or bullies the puppy, pup may learn that adult dogs are scary. This may put your dog on the defensive with other dogs in the future.
- Socializing primarily with puppies in the beginning while throwing in the occasional adult dog tends to be the best system for your pup's initial socializing experiences.

HUMAN PLAYTIME

- Playing with toys
 - Having a TON of toys for your pup is key! Different textures, smells, and sizes will help keep your puppy entertained and mentally stimulated.
 - Chewing is a way for puppies to relieve stress and anxiety, it is a self-soothing behavior that helps them calm down after getting excited or worked up about something. Make sure to encourage chewing on bones and toys. Having bones specifically for chewing and not for eating is important (EX. Nylabones).
 - Whenever your pup is chewing on inappropriate items (furniture, clothing, fingers, etc.) replace the item with an appropriate chew toy.
 - Playing games with toys will help teach your pup the rules when it comes to objects in their mouth. Teach GET IT and DROP IT while playing fetch or tug. Teach LEAVE IT and WAIT to encourage patience and self-control.
- Playing with hands
 - As a general rule, don't do it. If you don't want your puppy to bite something (hands, socks, water bottles), then don't use it as a toy.
 - If you are going to use inappropriate items during playtime, you need to be VERY clear when it is acceptable for your pup to put those items in their mouth.
 - I do use my hands to touch the dog during play, pat on the ground to encourage excited energy, and even (very gently) wrestle with the dog, but my hands are never used to antagonize, hurt, or tease the dog. It is important that your pup does not create a negative association with your hands.
- Keeping it calm
 - If your pup's excitement level is too high, it is very challenging for them to play appropriately.
 - Refer to the Doggie Point Scale Handout and Stress Signals Handout
 - Keeping the puppy at a low level of excitement (happy, not manic), will help them use their brain during play and have more self-control.
 - You influence your puppy's excitement level and energy! If you remain calm, that will help them remain calm. If you jump up and down and squeal with excitement in a high pitched voice, your puppy will match that enthusiasm.

CHEW DETERRENENTS

- Bitter Spray
 - These are sold at your local pet store and help discourage mouthing and chewing. When puppies put their mouth on items or hands sprayed with the bitter deterrents, they are met with an awful bitter taste.



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- Many puppies respond well to this method and stop putting inappropriate items in their mouth, however, some puppies LOVE the taste so test the formula before dousing your house with spray.
- Be careful! These sprays taste awful to humans too! If you do use the spray, make sure to wash your hands thoroughly so you don't unintentionally spread it. (I ate a sandwich after using bitter spray once, AWFUL!!!)
- There are also many DIY options for chew deterrents. Make sure to research things that are safe for dogs.

SHUNNING/FREEZING/YELPING

- Do not acknowledge naughty behavior. If your pup nips your hand to get attention, telling them "No" just gave them that attention. Instead, use a training technique to discourage the behavior. Remember, we have to try to communicate with them in a language they understand.
- Shunning
 - Whenever you feel puppy teeth, shun the puppy by removing their access to you.
 - This may include: put your hand in your pocket, turn your back, stand up, walk away, close the door, etc.
 - Base your response on the situation. If a puppy accidentally nips your finger, don't immediately leave the room and not talk to the pup for the rest of the day. Instead, if a pup accidentally nips your finger, put your hand in your pocket for 2 seconds then try playing again. If the pup escalates, match that by escalating your level of removal.
 - This teaches the puppy that if they don't play nicely, they lose access to you.
- Freezing
 - Whenever you feel puppy teeth, freeze!
 - This is a little self-sacrificial in the beginning, so be prepared.
 - When the puppy bites, completely shut down - don't move, don't talk, don't look at them, just freeze.
 - Usually, 3-5 seconds of freezing is enough, but base your response on the situation. Freeze until you no longer feel teeth. You can even push a step further and wait until the puppy calms down and looks at you for guidance. Then resume playtime so the puppy gets a reward for stopping the chomping!
 - This teaches the puppy that if they don't play nicely, all play stops.
- Yelping
 - Whenever you feel puppy teeth, jump and yelp by making a high-pitched, startling sound. (Guys, you need to really work on your high-pitched voices for this one!)
 - It should be a startling enough sound that your puppy stops play.
 - Use the techniques described in freezing to finish this exercise and don't resume play until puppy is calm and looking to you for guidance.
 - Always resume play when puppy is behaving appropriately.
 - If the sound does not stop the puppy, it was not meaningful to them. Make sure you get a startled response and not a more enthusiastic player.
- The techniques listed above are meant to be used repetitively during a play session. Every time you feel teeth, use a technique. Every time you no longer feel teeth, resume play. You may do less playing and more training in the beginning, but stick with it. Soon you should start to notice that the training techniques are being used less and less and the play sessions in between are longer and longer.



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- If you are not noticing results in a week, even though they may be minimal in the beginning, talk to Kelsey. Timing, tone, and energy are all very important to help our young pups understand; often, focusing on owner training skills, will help our pups learn quicker and easier.
- Remember, learning should be fun for your puppy! Make sure to never punish your pup for making the wrong choice, they are still learning!

Please contact Kelsey with any questions, comments, or concerns!! Congratulations on helping your pup become Pawsitively Trained!

Kelsey@PawsitivelyTrainedDogs.com (916) 899-9637



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