



Puppy Biting: Why?

Puppy Biting: Why

First we need to understand why puppies bite. Puppies explore the world through their mouths. Just like human babies, puppies like to put everything into their mouth. Puppies learn bite inhibition at 3 weeks - 8 weeks with their siblings and mother. Dogs don't have hands so the only way they can interact is with their mouth. We need to teach them in order to play they need to bring us a toy . *(we will discuss this in more detail in another section of the unit.)*

Puppies never bite, mouth or nip for no reason. They are trying to communicate with us. We as puppy parents, need to learn their signals, body language and invest time in finding out what it is that they want.

Reasons why puppies bite:

- **Over-tired** (puppies need at least 18 hrs sleep per day)
- **Over-stimulated** (*Too much play, interaction or access to every room can be far too exciting*)
- **Relief from excitement*** (following on from the above point.)*
- **Hunger** (*Puppies need 4 meals per day till they are 4 months old, 3 meals a day till 6 months old then 2 meals a day for the rest of their lives.*)
- **Using your hands to play** (Use toys rather than hands to play.)*
- **Being to tactile.** (Humans are very tactile, we love to stroke and touch our puppies all the time but more often than not our puppies find it annoying so will nip hands when they have had enough.)

- **Wanting to play.** (pulling, tugging and grabbing on trousers or long flowing clothing is a sign of play.)*
- **Teething** (From 14 weeks onwards puppies start teething up till 6 months old. Give your puppy access to lots of chews to help relive their pain.)

Keep a diary of your puppies activities and behaviours everyday. Take note of what was going on 20 minutes before puppy started biting and what was happening just before puppy started biting. This way you will be able to work out what your puppy is needing.

An example would be: If you have a young puppy (*under 16 weeks old*) and they have been awake for more than **90 minutes**, then it is more than likely your puppy is over tired and needs to be put into their **safe, quite place for a rest. Puppy pens** are ideal for this. Crates are good too or a small puppy proof room with a baby gate will do too. The location of the safe place shouldn't be too far away from the rest of the family but also in a quite part of the house. So, now you know the why's let's delve into the triggers and build up of puppy biting.



Puppy Biting: Triggers

Puppy Biting: Triggers and build up

There are lots of things that can trigger your puppy to bite. I touched on them in the previous section under 'why puppies bite' but let's go into more detail and talk about how they can build up the drive for biting behaviours to occur.

Hands: You might have read/ heard that letting your puppy bite your hand a little then letting out a loud "yelp" will teach your puppy bite inhibition. Well as a qualified dog trainer with years of experience I can say **this is not true**. Your puppy will learn bite inhibition from their siblings and mother during the first 8 weeks of their life. Plus what pressure of bite seems fine to you will feel different to others. Instead right from the start practice **No teeth on hands**. As soon as puppy tries to nip your hand, remove your hand straight away, get up and give your puppy a soft toy or a chew. Don't let your puppy bite your hand for 5-20 seconds before getting up! It really needs to be immediate. **Everyone** in the household should follow the same rules otherwise it just muddies the waters and you will find that biting can get worse if the puppy is getting mixed messages. Replacing your hand for a toy or a chew will teach your puppy that if they want to play with you or if they need to chew something to help them calm down then they should find their toy or chew rather than using your hand.

Using hands with play: Playing rough with your puppy or touching your puppy on their mouth or over their head can trigger biting. Instead of using your hands to play a bit of fun rough and tumble try playing tug with your puppy. Long soft toys are best for tug games. This way your puppy is less able to accidentally nip your hand during play. An old dressing gown tie is perfect or I love the long tug toys from Tug-E-Nuff. <https://amzn.to/37crAT4>

Movement: Children running around, bare feet, fluffy slippers, dressing gowns, long flowing dresses are big triggers for puppy biting. *(I will go into more detail on how to manage puppies and children in the next session of the unit)* **If possible avoid wearing** dressing gowns, fluffy slippers, flowing cloths around your puppy this will be much easier. This is just a phase! **Puppy biting will NOT last forever!** So you won't have to stop wearing dressing gowns forever it just for the **first few months**. If this is not possible then make sure you have a pocket full of your puppies dry food or treats before entering the room that your puppy is in. **Training plan:** As soon as your puppy comes running up towards you roll a piece of food on the floor away from you. This teaches the puppy that fun things will happen if they stand a meter away from you while you are moving around. Again you won't have to be throwing teats at your puppy forever its just for the first few months.

Over-Tied: This is one of the most common reasons for puppy biting. **Puppies need at least 18 hours rest / sleep a day!** If your puppy is not getting enough sleep they will get **grouchy, lack the motivation to want to learn and will become little land sharks**. Make sure you are giving your puppy lots of down time throughout the day. Puppies don't always recognise when they are tired so will run around like crazy and try to bite anything and everything instead. Help your puppy by luring them into their puppy play pen and then give them something to chew like a **stuffed Kong, Liki Mat, Snuffle Mat or natural chew**. This **acts as a pacifier** and will help to calm your puppy down enough for them to be able to sleep. Never use their pen. / crate as punishment always put your puppy in there with something for them to do.

Over-Stimulated: Give your puppy more mental stimulation rather than physical play, running around or too much access to all the room in the house. Often we think that by tiring our puppies out with lots of play and running around you will get a more peaceful sleep. This logic is not the case at all. The more hyped up and over stimulated your puppy is the higher their adrenalin levels will be. When your puppy has lots of

adrenalin they will struggle to calm back down which often results in crazy "Zoomies" This then makes them manic and they will start biting a lot when they are in this highly aroused state of mind.

Hunger: If a puppy is hungry they haven't learnt how to communicate this to their new humans yet. So they might start biting us to get our attention.

Zoomies: Puppy Zoomies also known as FRAP (Frenetic Random Activity Period) attacks, are precisely that, random bursts of high activity and energy. They usually don't last long and you will know a zoomie episode when you see one. Your pup may suddenly start running around like crazy from one end of the house to the other, or you may see your dog running in frantic circles. The most common causes of zoomies include overexcitement and pent up energy in puppies. Most puppies will outgrow zoomies as they get older, and not all puppies will be plagued by this odd behaviour.

Loud Noises: Squealing or shouting "Ouch" will NOT stop your puppy from biting in-fact it will have the opposite affect. Depending on your puppy's personality making these noises might frighten your puppy which could stop the behaviour momentarily but then your puppy will start to panic and when puppies are feeling stressed they need to chew on something to help bring their heart rate down so they will go back to biting more than before. Or by making these noises it can excite your puppy straight away and they could perceive it as playful attention which will increase the biting.

Saying NO: This just makes the puppy confused and cross will increase biting rather than decrease the biting



Puppy Biting: Do's and Don'ts

Puppy Biting: What To do and what Not to do

This is a long section but the most important. Grab a cuppa.

What to do:

Make sure you involve the whole family in training and learning how to interact with the puppy. If everyone is on board with the rules and following through this will help your puppy and will make the whole process a lot easier.

Management: This is the first thing to put into place. Just like having a toddler. making sure your home is **puppy proof** will make your life a lot easier and doing this before puppy arrives will be even better. **Control the environment not your puppy.** Prepare a puppy safe area. Puppy Pens are great as the puppy can still have room to walk around, play and stretch out. A small puppy safe room with a baby gate is the second best thing and a crate is okay but a crate alone is not ideal. You need to have a safe area that the puppy can't get to you. This safe area must be somewhere that is not too far away and the puppy can still see you.

Puppy Proof: Under the same category as management you need to make sure you have fully puppy proofed all the rooms that the puppy can have access to. Anything that your puppy can pick up must be out of the puppy area. Chasing or grabbing items out of your puppy's mouth can cause a puppy to become fearful and aggressive. I would

recommend not letting your puppy have access to the rest of the house until she is fully toilet trained.

What to do when your puppy bites: For new young puppies if he starts to bite limitedly stand up, start walking away and fold your arms. New puppies they don't like it when you walk away from them (*this only works for young puppies under the age of 14 weeks*). Then come back with a toy that you are happy for your puppy to play with. Chews are great, soft toys, things that he doesn't have access to all the time. I like to have a special little toy box in the room but out of reach of the puppy. In there I will have special toys and chews that my puppy likes but can't have access to all the time.

How keeping a diary becomes helpful: By keeping a diary of your puppy's biting activity you will start to learn the times of the day your puppy gets bitty. Then you can start to predict the behaviour before it happens. If your puppy always starts to become nippy at 11am then at 10:55am go to the special toy box and give your puppy one of his favourite chews or toys. This way biting does not start to become reinforced instead you have become the person who can fulfil your puppy's needs without them having to resort in biting.

Gabbing, pulling and shaking of clothing: Remember this behaviour is your puppy's way of telling you that they want to play. So again by noting down the times, what's happening in the environment just before the grabbing of clothing happens you can start to predict when during the day your puppy wants to play. If its 12pm everyday then introduce the special tug toy around 11:55am. Or if your puppy always starts to tug on clothing just after a run in the garden have a little play of tug just before she comes back into the house.

Zoomies: Give your puppy somethings to go wild with. A rummage box is perfect. A rummage box consists of a cardboard box filled with a few toilet rolls tubes, kitchen roll tubes, plastic milk cartons, empty egg boxes and anything that can be easily teared up. Then scatter a few treats in the box too. Your puppy will love the distraction of the game and it is a great way to get out all that excess energy. It is all about redirecting your puppy onto something that she can have. Scatter feeding, Kongs, Liki Mats, Snuffle Mats are other good options. Again being able to predict the timing of the zoomies will be a major plus as you can redirect your puppy before they get into an uncontrollable frenzy.

Chasing legs: If your puppy needs to chase then **give him an alternative thing to chase** like a tug toy but don't over play this game as puppies get over-aroused every quickly. **5 minutes play sessions max** followed by scatter feeding or a different **enrichment activity**. If your puppy still keeps chasing you and every time you get up he starts to go for your feet then **rather than waiting for him to do it again** start to predict this behaviour and **be proactive not reactive**. Follow the steps below:

- Gab a hand full of treats
- as you stand up imminently roll a treat on the floor away from you
- take another step and roll another treat and so on. This way you are teaching the puppy that the rewards come by standing a little away from your feet rather than on your feet.

Children: This is a very common problem and can offer be the more stressful. Most new puppy parents dream of their new puppy and children getting on all the time and becoming best friends but in reality the first 6 months can be very hard and often ends up in tears. Puppies bite! Their teeth are tiny and sharp and it hurts a lot. Movement triggers play biting, being too tactile, being picked up and too handsy are all triggers and are the things that children like to do. So this is where lots of management needs to come in: Stand still.

- Children running outside in the garden - the puppy will find this exciting and will chase. It's easier to keep puppy inside while kids are outside or to keep puppy on lead. make sure you are rewarding puppy for lying down next to you while you and the puppy watch the kids run around. *Remember it is not forever* - but the more your puppy can chase the kids the more fearful your the children will be and the harder it will be for your puppy to calm back down.
- Children running around in the house - put puppy in their safe area with an activity to do (*Stuffed Kong, snuffle mat, long last chew etc*)
- If puppy starts to bite ask your child to stand still and fold their arms. This will stop the biting from escalating then call your puppy over to you. Reward them for leaving the exciting play friend and coming to you instead. Then redirect.
- Teach calm interactions between children and puppy. This way your puppy won't associate the children with exciting play toy. This can be done by having supervised **2 minute training sessions** a couple of times a day between child and puppy. (*for more information check out my online puppy course.*)

Rewarding good behaviours: Have little pots small treats scattered around the puppy proofed rooms. (up high so puppy can't reach.) Look for behaviours you like and **reward them**. We often only pay attention to our puppy when they are doing something 'naughty' like chewing the furniture, digging up the garden etc and we ignore our puppy when they are being calm and good. Our puppy will quickly learn that in order to get your attention they need to do something 'naughty' If your puppy is sitting quietly go up to him calmly and give him a reward. If your puppy comes running up to you and just looks at you or sits next to you rather than jumping up or biting you should reward them. The more the behaviours we like get reinforced the more your puppy will do them.

What gets reinforced gets repeated. Puppy never do something unless they are getting reinforced in some way. Make sure the rewards are given calmly. Too much excitement will get the puppy hyped up and it will end in puppy biting.

What NOT to do:

- Don't **Shout** at your puppy
- Don't **play rough** with your puppy, especially with your hands
- Saying **NO** will NOT work
- If you have a very excitable puppy then its best to have **no hands on puppy**. (*remember its not forever.*)
- No **chase games** when puppy is young. This can encourage pulling at cloths, biting feet and jumping up.
- **Picking your puppy** up too much will make your puppy bite. Most dogs don't like being picked up at all. They might tolerate it over the first few days of being with you but it will always end in nipping (Never get your young child to pick puppy up.)
- Don't use your puppy's play pen / crate as a **punishment**. Instead use it as a management tool. Always give your puppy something to do when they are in their pen like a chew or Kong. Don't leave them to cry it out or put them in there in anger, leaving them to "chill out" with nothing to do apart from cry will just frighten puppy and will course more problems in the long run.
- Never use a **water spray bottle!** This might stop them in the begging but will quickly turn into fear and aggression.
- Anything that is **punishment based has consciences** and can turn into aggression later down the line.