



**Good Friends
Animal
Hospital**

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Ouch!

Mouthing and biting are natural puppy behaviors. Although puppy jaws lack strength and their bites rarely cause damage, the bites can be quite painful. Puppies find mouthing and biting quite fun and humans find curtailing this activity very frustrating.

Teaching Bite Inhibition

Even the nicest and well-trained adult dogs, may, under some circumstances be provoked to bite. For this reason it is important to train puppies to *inhibit* their bite (not to bite hard) before you teach them not to bite at all. Puppies must learn that humans are extremely sensitive to any pressure from sharp puppy teeth. The best way to communicate this to your puppy is to give a yelp “Ouch, that hurt!” If the puppy is especially excited and continues to bite hard, then yelp again and walk away. Ignore the puppy for a moment, then call it over to give it a calm pat. There is usually no need to further punish the puppy. Be certain to praise your puppy as his bite softens. As your puppy’s bite continues to decrease in force, ask that he use less and less pressure. If your puppy should forget his training, give a warning like “Easy” or “Gentle.” If your puppy continues or does not decrease the bite pressure, yelp and walk away. By the time your puppy is 4 months old, there should be no pressure exerted during the “bite.”

Preventing Bites

Once the puppy learns to inhibit his bite, the next step is to teach the puppy that mouthing and biting are not allowed—EVER! If the puppy should gently mouth your hand, give a warning like “OFF” or “NO BITE.” Your voice should be soft but firm. At this point, your puppy will have no idea what you are talking about and it’s unlikely he will comply. Take him by the jowls, stare him in the eyes and repeat the warning in a slightly louder voice. As he gets the idea, gently push him away and ignore him for several minutes. Then call him to you and praise him for coming. If your puppy won’t come to you, your reprimand has been too severe. If he continues to bite, then you might need to be more forceful with your reprimand. In time, bite frequency should decrease. By the time your puppy is 4 months old, he should understand that once he is warned to stop, he should not continue to mouth.

In the final step of training, give your puppy the warning *before* he bites or mouths, then reprimand if necessary. As the puppy learns that all mouthing is inappropriate, the reprimand is given *without* the warning. By the age of 4 months, the “puppy biting” should be under control.

This program is for puppies only. For adult dogs that bite, consult a behavior professional.