

What is it?

Puppies are little biting machines. They bite things that move, things that don't move, each other, your hands, anything. Not only is this normal, it is an important part of their development. When puppies play, they learn from their playmates' yelps and body language when a bite is too hard. Over time, a puppy figures out how to use her mouth more gently (inhibit her bite) to keep play going.

Is some biting ok?

Dogs have very fine control of their mouth. They can pick a tiny piece of kibble up off the floor and hunting dogs carry prey in their mouth without any damage upon return. In all training, consistency is important. Your puppy needs to learn that human skin is fragile and can't be treated as roughly as a fur coat. Discuss as a family how much tolerance you will have for your puppies biting. Keep in mind that if one person allows biting during play, it will take much longer to learn that playing that way with a 3-year old is inappropriate. If your puppy will be around a lot of kids in the future, it may be best to teach your pup, across the board, it is never ok to put their teeth on human skin.

How to teach your puppy to bite more softly.

- Hard bites should result in an immediate time-out. Stop play, and leave your puppy alone or put her in a time-out area (kennel or tether) for one minute.
- Soft or accidental bites during play should result in a removal of attention. If you feel your pup's teeth touch your skin, stand up straight and ignore. Do not look at, talk to or touch your pup until the pup has calmed down (roughly 15 seconds).
- Once your pup learns that teeth touching skin makes play stop and/or person moves away, they will be more cognizant of how people prefer to interact.

But my puppy keeps biting me, what can I do?

Some puppies are more persistent than others. If you attempt to ignore your pup and they keep jumping or biting you, it may be time to give a longer time out. Walk into a different room and close the door or baby gate. You may consider using a leash tether in the future so you can remove yourself from the puppies space without them chasing you. A time out in the kennel is fine as well, as long as you sound cheery when you place them inside.

Three strikes, you're out.

If your pup bites, then you ignore him, then he bites you again, apply the three strikes rule. If you ignore your pup three times in a row for biting during play, walk away for a longer period of time or use confinement. He is likely to amp up to play appropriately.

Toy trade.

When your pup bites, you can try to give him another toy before you walk away. This will give the pup something appropriate to do after the bite. Be careful that you do not chain the two together. Some smart puppies will learn that when they are bored, they will bite you so that you pick up a toy and begin playing. If you do a toy trade, give them a toy and ignore for 15 seconds. Once they are playing appropriately on their own, now you can engage with them if you'd like.

My puppy really hurts when he bites, can I yell at him?

If your puppy is biting hard, he is likely pretty amped up. Yelling, shouting no or yipping amps some puppies up even more. If you try yipping and your dog backs off, it may work for that individual. For most dogs, yipping flips the switch to tell them "game on!" and they go into puppy zoomies or come back to bite harder. It is not because they are aggressive, just overstimulated. Calmly ignoring and walking away is more effective for these pups than shouting or making loud noises. Every pup is different so experiment to find what works best for your puppy.

Training Tip: Think about when your puppy is most likely to play bite and be ready to deliver a time-out if necessary. For example, when playing tug, when your puppy is excited about something, and when you come home from work.
