

# Chewing, Puppy Mouthing and Dog Bites

By Deb Mickey

Dogs, unlike humans, do not have hands to grasp or grab. Dogs use their mouth and teeth to grab and hold onto objects. All dogs, no matter what size or shape, have teeth – and mighty teeth at that. How these dogs are treated as puppies and as young adults greatly impacts whether or not the family dog will use its teeth destructively or aggressively during its lifetime.

Dogs chew and puppies mouth our hands. It's a given, natural, and *necessary* part of being a dog, and they do these behaviors for a variety of reasons. Puppies need to chew to help their adult teeth come in and their puppy teeth drop out. Dogs of all ages chew because they are bored or frustrated, to expend excess energy, or for the pure pleasure of chewing. Puppies mouth our hands to explore the use of their teeth. If you watch 2 puppies or dogs play, you'll see a lot of mouthing. They are learning the important dog lesson of how to inhibit the force of their bite. No dog wants the game to end because they bite down too hard! Most mouthing and chewing goes away as the dog ages, but some dogs will have the need to chew their entire life.

## Chewing

What objects your dog chews depends on how you handle your dog's need to chew.

Puppies and young dogs under the age of 2 years need to be watched carefully when they have the run of the house. Puppies are clean slates - they don't know our man-made rules on how to live in our society. They have no idea that an old sneaker is different from your best dress shoe or the old knotted sock is different from the rest of your laundry unless you teach them. Adolescent dogs, being young dogs, may often forget the rules.

Give your puppy plenty of appropriate chew toys. Knotted socks and old shoes are fine but you will need to teach your dog to distinguish them from the good socks and shoes.

***When your dog picks up an inappropriate object***, calmly and cheerfully ask the dog to bring the object to you. Take it from the dog and praise the dog. Offer the dog a more appropriate object. Play with this object and the dog for a few seconds

then let the dog have the object to chew. Praise your dog for chewing this object then leave the dog alone.

**NEVER** - Chase your dog to get something from it. Dogs love to play keep away with them being “it.” Chasing your dog only rewards the dog for picking up the object and teaches him to hold on to it at all costs! Chasing the dog in anger can also scare the dog and teach it to avoid being close to you. A scared dog never will come when called.

## **Mouthing**

Usually puppies mouth our hands when excited or when playing and puppies usually do this more to children than adults. Here’s what both adults and children can do to discourage this behavior.

When the puppy is mouthing, quietly tell the pup “no” and calmly remove your hands from the puppies’ range – end the pup’s game. Fold your arms or put your hands in pockets or behind your back. Resist flailing your hands about as the excited movement will only trigger the pup to grab at your hands even more. For adults, if the pup persists, firmly but gently put your hand around the pup’s muzzle, give it a slight shake, and in a quiet, low voice give a warning such as “No bite,” then take your hands off the puppy. This must be done calmly. If done any other way the pup will become more excited and frantic in its mouthing. Verbally praise your pup when it stops mouthing then continue playing with your pup. If the mouthing becomes too frantic while playing, totally end the game by leaving the room or walking away from the pup.

Some puppies grab at ankles. Here a firm, calm scruff shake may be what’s needed along with a quiet, low warning voice. Then immediately take you hands off the puppy and verbally praise your pup.

The above will need repeated repeatedly until the pup learns that hands and ankles are off limits.

**NEVER** - Hit or slap your dog with your hand or any other object for inappropriate chewing or mouthing. Dogs don’t understand hitting; that’s a human reaction. Again, a dog frightened of its owner will never come when called. Hitting and slapping can provoke an aggressive or frighten reaction to people that can last your dog’s lifetime.

**NEVER** - React to inappropriate chewing or mouthing with anger. Your anger only frightens the pup – it doesn't teach the pup what it should be doing.

Remember, with young dogs and puppies you are *TEACHING* them how to live in our society... not punishing them for rules they do not understand yet.

***The Last Word.*** It's important to realize and remember that dogs usually outgrow chewing and mouthing behaviors. Patience is key. Usually, a behavior ignored is a behavior that goes away. How you react to these behaviors when your dog is a puppy greatly impacts your relationship with your dog and determines whether your dog will grow up to be a biter or a well-adjusted member of our society.

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