



PLAY BITING

What Is Play Biting?

Puppies are little biting machines. They bite things that move, things that don't move; they bite each other; they bite your hands, your feet, your clothes—to them, anything is fair game. This behavior is totally normal for puppies and it's an important part of their development.

When puppies play, they learn from each other when a bite is too hard. This takes the form of yelps, body language, and suspension of play activity. The average pup quickly figures out how to use her mouth more gently to keep play going. This development of a soft mouth and bite control is called *Bite Inhibition*, and it is The Single Most Important Thing to teach any pup before he or she turns 5 months old when adult teeth begin to emerge and jaw strength increases exponentially.

Why You Should Allow Some Biting

Puppies need to learn that humans are total wimps: our skin is fragile and we can't be treated as roughly as their furry playmates. By letting your puppy bite you with varying degrees of pressure over a controlled learning period, you'll teach her to develop a soft mouth and to not bite you at all, unless you invite it.

Why a "No Biting" Policy Is a Very Bad Idea

You may encounter information about never ever allowing young puppies to bite at all. This is based on outdated methods and involves techniques such as holding the pup's mouth shut, giving sharp verbal reprimands, or rolling the pup on its back. This type of training might appear to stop a puppy from biting you in the short term, but the side effects can be disastrous: your pup may become afraid of you, or afraid of other people, or she may become fearful when having her head, mouth, or body handled in unrelated situations.

But the real downside to a no biting policy is that your pup doesn't learn actual control over her mouth. That means if she's ever startled or hurt and reacts by biting, she may bite so hard that she causes serious injury. Why? Because she never learned how to control her bite while she was still a pup.

How To Train:

- For several weeks, you're going to do "bite training" with your pup so she gradually learns to reduce the force of her bite with you, your family members, and eventually with other humans.
- Each week you will get a little stricter about your puppy's bite pressure so that it tapers off from "hard crunches" and becomes very soft mouthing, if any at all.
- Depending on your pup's temperament and rate of learning, you'll use either Plan A or Plan B as described on the next page; or you can use a combo of both plans.
- Feed as many meals as possible to your pup by hand. Release the kibble only for a polite soft mouth. If your pup gets nippy with your hand, simply close your fist around the food and wait without saying anything. Your pup will eventually give up on biting and sit back to wait for the food. For more advanced practice, try the same exercise with "lickable" foods that you can smear on your fingers.
- If your pup is engaging in regular supervised play with other pups and safe adult dogs, her furry playmates will expertly teach her how to bite them appropriately, especially if she gets too rough or acts annoying. This is a key component of successful bite training as well as puppy socialization, so keep up the puppy play dates!



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PLAN A:

This approach is appropriate for very young pups (under 12 weeks). It's also recommended for pups who show any social shyness or fear with humans. If you aren't quite sure about your pup, start with Plan A. But if the pressure of your pup's bite doesn't change within a week, switch to Plan B.

1. Hold your pup in your lap when she is tired, calm, and not excited.
2. Put your finger in the corner of your pup's mouth near the molars.
3. Wait for your pup to bite down with some noticeable pressure.
4. When she does, you can yelp or loudly say "Ouch!" But don't move your finger. If you pull your finger out of your pup's mouth, she will learn to chase it in order to bite it again like a play toy. So stay strong and keep your hand very still.
5. The second your pup eases up on bite pressure, praise her lavishly and pet her gently with your other hand.
6. Repeat over and over as many times a day as possible.

PLAN B:

This approach is appropriate for many older pups (over 12 weeks), and for pups who like to chase feet and/or bite clothing, and especially for pups who don't respond to Plan A. These pups are excited by your yelps and bite you harder because they think it's a game and that YOU are a Big Squeaky Toy!

1. Wait for your pup to nip or bite your body parts or clothing.
2. The moment she bites with any pressure, say "Too Bad" or "Time Out".
3. Then either immediately leave the room (if puppy-proofed), or place her in a Time Out Area for 10 to 20 seconds (see *Time Out* handout for more complete guidance).
4. Repeat this Every Single Time your pup bites you or family members with unacceptable pressure.
5. If the pressure IS okay, such as soft mouthing, then praise her and allow play to continue.

Real Life Training Tip

If your pup is in nippy mood and you don't have time to train or supervise her, put her in a confinement area with a chewie or a stuffable food toy such as a Kong. This is not punishment; this is a management option to give her a safe, legal outlet for biting and chewing. Plus, it will help you stay sane.

Need More Help?

We have trained millions of pups to be polite with their mouths. Contact us if you'd like a Bravo trainer to work privately with you on bite training, or to give you counsel by phone via our BravoPup Hotline. We can help you turn a chronic biter into a respectful, gentle pup in no time at all.