

Published based on [Stop Dog From Nipping and Play Biting](#)

# **Stop Dog From Nipping and Play Biting**

**Nipping - the playful biting and mouthing of your hands and clothes by your dog** - is particularly common among **puppies**, but can also occur in **older dogs** that haven't been **taught proper bite inhibition**.

It's **natural for dogs to mouth and nip**. They explore the world using their mouths - to a dog, his mouth is as important as eyes and hands are to us. **Nipping is very different from true aggression**: it's a form of communication, interaction, exploration, and play.

From birth, **pups use their mouths** to explore the den, their mother, and their littermates. From a few weeks old, they use their mouths to play with their siblings: **puppies play by biting and mouthing** each other. Some adult dogs - usually, those with owners who encourage rough play, or who were removed from the litter at too early an age - retain these same tendencies to **nip during play** and in **moments of emotional duress**.

Sibling play is actually **how young pups learn a very important lesson**, called bite inhibition. If a puppy bites another puppy too hard, the other **pup yelps loudly in pain and stops playing with him**. This teaches the biter that such a degree of bite force results in an undesirable outcome: **social isolation**.

When other **puppies bite him**, that's how he **learns what that pain feels like**. (This is one of the reasons that puppies removed from the litter too early are often 'maladjusted' - they've missed out on some of the **important lessons their mother and littermates have to teach**).

Even **pups that have learned basic bite inhibition** from their siblings usually need to be reconditioned again upon entering their new home: humans are much more easily damaged than dogs, so it's necessary for us to intervene and **refine the puppy's bite pressure even further**.

**A dog without any concept of bite inhibition is both annoying and dangerous to have around**: a harmless play session can rapidly turn into painful ordeal. Puppies aren't capable of inflicting serious damage - although their little teeth are razor sharp, their jaws are too weak to do much more than elicit a trickle of blood - but an adult dog can do a great deal more than just scratch the surface, and it makes very little difference to a wounded human that the dog **"didn't mean to do it"**!

Here's **what to do to teach your dog good bite inhibition**.

**Note: this same technique is applicable to older dogs, although the same results may take a little longer to attain**.

**When playing with your puppy or dog, you'll need to choose the level of mouthing that you're prepared to accept**. Some owners are content for their dogs to touch their hands with their teeth, as long as no pressure is exerted; others (particularly those with large, strong-jawed dogs) prefer to get the message across that no tooth-contact is acceptable whatsoever.

Whenever you reach your level of tolerance with your pup - he might **give you a good nip**, or he might just grab your fingers gently in his mouth - squeal shrilly and loudly in pain and immediately turn your entire body away from him. Get up and walk a few paces away from him, keeping your face and eyes averted. Don't speak to him, and don't touch him.

**The aim here is for the puppy to be completely socially isolated for the next 20 to 30 seconds** - long enough for the lesson to sink in, but not long enough for him to forget what it was that elicited such a response and start playing with something else.

**(Note: if there are other people present, you'll need to ensure that they mimic your behavior here - don't allow them to start playing with or otherwise paying attention to the puppy or dog, or else all your good work will have been undone)**.

Most young dogs, and some older ones, seem to have an innate need to chew something - anything! - whenever they're being played with or petted. To keep the focus off your hands, and **prevent him from learning**

**what a delightful chew toy your fingers make**, supply him with a more appropriate chew: anything with a slight give to it should do the trick.

Rawhide bones, pigs' ears, or squeezey rubber toys all go down a treat. - If he should start snapping for your hands or face while playing, correct him quickly with a sharp, "No!", or "AH-ah-aaah!" He should stop, startled. As soon as he stops, praise him (**you're praising the stopping, not the original behavior - don't be confused by their close proximity**) and then quickly redirect his attention to an appropriate chew. When his jaws close around it, praise him again and give him a pat. - Never use physical force to **correct your dog for inappropriate chewing or mouthing**. Not only is it mostly unnecessary, but in most cases it will **actually encourage further nipping and biting**.

**The cold-shoulder technique (as outlined above) is the most effective, and humane, manner of conveying your displeasure to your dog**. He wants to please you: he just has to figure out how to do so. He has a much better chance of doing so if you refrain from corporal punishment and give him 30 seconds of isolation instead. - If your dog's getting really revved up and is **making repeated attempts to nip you**, despite cold-shouldering him, he might need to cool down a bit.

In this case, the 'time out' method is appropriate: take him to his crate, or to a small room by himself, and leave him there for five minutes to chill out a bit. When it's time to bring him back into the heart of the household, you can start playing again - just try to tone it down a notch or two until you're sure he can **tolerate the play without further nipping**. - For a dog that needs little encouragement to become overexcited and mouthy (**high-energy herding breeds in particular are prone to this**), choose non-contact play whenever feasible.

Frisbee and fetch are great choices; even tug-of-war, provided your dog knows a reliable 'drop it' command, is suitable. **Avoid rough play like slap-boxing** (where you hit the sides of a dog's face gently with open palms) and full-on wrestling at all costs: **these games encourage nipping**, but also call a **dog's instinctive aggression into the mix**, which is something to be avoided. Keep games friendly and low-key instead.

### **For more information**

For further information on **typical doggie behavior**, including a fantastic resource for training how-to's and loads of detailed **information on preventing and dealing with problem behaviors**, check out Secrets to Dog Training.

Written by a professional dog-trainer, it's an absorbing guide that deals with all the subjects a responsible dog-owner could ever want to know about - well worth a look.

To visit Secrets to Dog Training, just click on the link below:

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