

PUPPIES NIP & BITE – This may help:

Why do puppies nip and bite? They do not have the sense of touch or brains that think like we do. So they must explore this new world with mouths and noses. Part of the canine experience is biting siblings. By biting and playing with their siblings, puppies learn how hard their bites are and what is acceptable pressure. They learn this when playing with brothers and sisters. That is why the six to eight week growth period in a litter's new life is so important. During these two weeks, the litter plays, bites and experiences a pecking order. This leads to learning what is acceptable. But play biting a sibling and biting a human is totally different. This is especially true with children. We do not have fur to help protect us from the bite.

When watching a litter, one notices that a sibling will yelp or squeal when one of the litter is biting too hard or too aggressive. Also, the puppy will immediately exit the area and move away from the sibling that is acting this way. We should learn from this and help our new puppy realize that biting is not acceptable. We can squeal or yelp also, as we move away from the puppy and area. This eliminates what the puppy wants – playful interaction with its human companion. Moving away from the puppy eliminates what the puppy wants – attention. Hopefully repeating this procedure consistently will help the puppy to realize that biting is not acceptable. Licking and mouthing are not biting. These are actions that puppies do to each other to show affection and companionship. Even adult dogs like to lick or mouth the hand of their human. This behavior can be encouraged and rewarded. It's the pressure of the sharp teeth against the skin that cannot be accepted.

Some trainers suggest holding the puppy's mouth, or pushing the pup's mouth skin inward so the teeth hurt it. This is all negative training and against all positive training goals. It is always better to have a canine companion that is doing good behaviors because it knows it is pleasing you, its human buddy. Not acting out of fear or pain. That is why one of the best training methods is "redirection".

Redirection is simply always having a toy or puppy play item available to insert into the puppy's mouth in place of a hand, or shoe, or pant leg, or – you get the idea. The redirection from something that is unacceptable to something that is totally acceptable is positive training. It lets the puppy know that these instinctual feelings it is having are OK. BUT – it must be with an item that is meant for puppies to chew not our hands or clothing.

The redirection method of training is very easily done by children also. The children have to be trained first in this method. The parents have to make sure that the child knows what teasing behavior is and that it is not allowed. If the child has something available to redirect the puppy's chewing, both are learning. Not only is the puppy doing something that is okay to do, the child is learning that consistent, positive training makes the bond between human and canine even stronger.

Everyone knows that it is very difficult for young children not to wave their arms, bounce around, and many other young antics that are second nature. This entices puppies to do what is second nature to them, that is bite at the waving hands if accessible; bite at the dancing ankles; grab and hold onto the waving pant legs. Does this mean that children and puppies cannot play like this together? Children and puppies playing together is one of our most wonderful experiences as parents and families. One of the main motivators for adopting a puppy is to have the children experience an animal friend that can run and play with you. Fetch the ball, catch the Frisbee, swim in the creek, these are all memories that all animal lovers have and cherish. But what must be understood by the children, parents and puppies is that there are boundaries. And the children, as well as the parents, have to learn the right way to teach the puppy the acceptable behaviors.

Everyone wants to teach their puppy to sit, lie down, come when called, but teaching the pup not to bite should be at the top of list next to potty training. This is an instinctual, non-thought process that the puppy does. The pup must be calmly and positively trained to control this urge. Children and adults need to be calm, thoughtful, consistent trainers for the pup to learn.

Once this is learned, tug-of-war with a rope toy, tugging on the Frisbee before voicing the "drop it" command, are all fun things with no inappropriate biting consequences. Remember that the puppy is also going through a "teething" cycle at this time of its life. New teeth are growing in and baby teeth falling out. We can help the process by using a frozen rope toy, ice cubes made with beef or chicken broth, or frozen sweet potato fries*used as treats. Having a cold hard treat to chew on helps with the teething discomfort and also gives the puppy something that is all right to bite and gnaw on instead of hands.

Will the puppy outgrow this behavior if I don't do anything? Maybe. But it takes time and you miss a wonderful opportunity to bond with your puppy. Puppies want your love and affection. They want to be with you and please you. The more we do to reinforce this need and make it a positive sharing growing experience, the greater the bond between the dog and his person. When we see a dog and human walking, playing, having a fun time together it is because of love and hard work and consistent training.