



505 Sheffield Rd.  
Manchester, NH 03103  
603-669-4644  
Fax-641-6767  
[www.alldogsgym.com](http://www.alldogsgym.com)

## PUPPY ESSENTIALS: NIPPING & BITING

Puppies use their mouths. They chew fingers, grab ankles, and put their teeth on everything. Prior to the age of 13 weeks, you can help your puppy learn to moderate his bite, to limit the pressure of his bite by letting him know when he's biting too hard. As he's nibbling on your fingers, let him know the instant he starts to bite too hard. Yelp "Ow!" in a startled voice. *Do not pull your hand away*, rather hold your hand in place so your puppy moves his mouth away from your hand. As long as he's mouthing gently, that's fine. But as soon as he starts to bite too hard, tell him. This will help him learn "bite inhibition."

Once your pup is around 13 weeks old, he has entered a new period of psychological development. This means that after 13 weeks of age, you want to discourage him from mouthing you in any way by reinforcing non-biting behavior when you play with your puppy (such as tug o' war – see our instructions on this game). You can also divert your puppy's teething to his own chew toys.

If you run into difficulty, or your puppy isn't responding to this approach, talk with your instructor.

### **Puppy Biting Children**

Prior to coming to your home, your puppy had littermates - other puppies to play with. He engaged in lots of physical play - biting, jumping, running, wrestling, and tugging on various body parts. It is natural to transfer that type of play to the youngsters in his new family. And the more the kids scream, flail and run, the more fun and rewarding this play is to the puppy.

Does yelling at your puppy make him stop? You've likely tried it. Did it work? No. Will your puppy outgrow it? Possibly, but as long as it continues to be rewarding (that is, a fun "game"), it's difficult to get him to stop. It is quite possible that counting on your puppy to simply outgrow the behavior means he won't. Is there anything that can be done? Of course! Here are our recommendations:

- No roughhousing. Have children pet the puppy calmly and gently. (No roughhousing includes the adults, too. Roughhousing and wrestling teach your puppy to use his mouth—the precise thing you *don't want*.)
- If the puppy starts to mouth the kids, they should immediately stop petting, fold their arms and sit still. If he continues trying to play roughly after they've done this, you (the adult) say “Nope” or “Uh!” and put him in his crate for a brief time-out (brief can be as short as 30 seconds in this case).
- Have the children play "good" games, such as retrieve, tug o' war (following our instructions) or accompany you when you take the puppy for short walks.
- Most importantly, both the puppy and the children need to spend calm time together to learn to live together. Supervision and control will prevent children from developing a fear of the puppy because he has hurt them. Supervised, controlled interaction will enable both young 'uns to develop a happy, healthy, cooperative relationship for lots of years.

Follow this plan religiously for a month or two, without errors, and the behavior should disappear. But you must be fully committed to the plan. If this strategy is not in place all the time (that's 100% - no errors!), it constitutes random reinforcement, strengthening the puppy's nipping behavior. Even if it's only occasionally that the kids run away screaming with the puppy in hot pursuit nipping at their ankles, it's enough to encourage the great nipping game.

If you run into difficulty, or your puppy isn't responding to this approach, talk with your instructor or call us for an appointment for a behavioral consultation.

***This handout is provided to you by Gail Fisher's All Dogs Gym & Inn, where we believe that an educated owner and an educated dog are the best ingredients for a lifetime of mutual enjoyment.***