



DOG TRAINING

Helping you and your dog become best friends for life.

BITE INHIBITION

No matter how much training you do and how gentle your dog is, under certain circumstances any dog can be provoked to bite. Biting is an act of defense for a dog. It is a very instinctual, survival response. There are a variety of reasons that a dog may bite and contrary to popular belief, few bites are committed by "aggressive" dogs. The majority of dogs that bite are either friendly and playful, or shy and fearful.

There are three underlying causes of dog bites

1. The dog lacks confidence and finds humans threatening. This results in a need to defend themselves or their belongings. If a dog is injured or fears he is going to be injured, he may bite.
2. Biting is a fun, normal canine behavior and nobody has taught them otherwise. This is usually a dog that may bite when it wants to play or during play.
3. An aggressive disposition that has gone unchanged by the owner. (Most of these dogs actually lack self confidence and are unsure of their place in the pack hierarchy.) The truly dominant dog is usually not overtly aggressive.

Many of the traditional methods used to teach puppies not to bite include scruff shakes, cuffing the puppy under the chin, pinching their lips against their teeth and even the infamous "alpha wolf rollover." What many people find when using these methods is that the puppy just turns around and bites harder. Aggression on our part results in more aggression from the puppy. The method we will show you to inhibit biting works very differently. With this method you can minimize biting and any damage if your dog should ever bite.

Your puppy, even at its young age, has extremely powerful jaws and sharp teeth. As your puppy matures, its jaws will become even stronger. An adult dog has jaws and teeth that are fully capable of ripping apart a carcass and cracking bones. Dogs developed such powerful jaws and teeth because they needed them to survive in the wild.

Adult dogs are social animals and because their jaws are such a powerful weapon, they have developed a very ritualized form of aggression to prevent serious injury to one another during altercations. Every puppy is born knowing how to bite; yet they do not automatically know how to bite softly. They can however learn to bite softly through their interactions with other puppies, dogs and us.

When we see a litter of puppies playing, we see them exploring one another with their paws and their mouths. This play is fun for the puppies, but is also an important part of learning. Much of their play looks as though they are fighting and biting at one another. This play is how they learn ritualized aggression.

While puppies are playing with one another, they are also learning bite inhibition - how to control the strength of their bite. For example: when two puppies are wrestling and one bites the other too hard, the puppy that has been bitten will yelp and move away from the biting puppy, stopping play. The puppy that did the biting has just learned that if he bites too hard, his friend stops playing with him. Biting too hard makes the fun end. Now puppies being puppies, the one that was bitten will eventually come back and play will resume; however, the biting puppy will have learned not to bite so hard.

When we take a puppy away from its litter, we also are removing it from a school where it learns much about bite inhibition. If taken into a home without other dogs, and if its new people do not allow play biting, the puppy will no longer have opportunities to learn how to inhibit its bite.

Unfortunately, many dog-training books actively discourage play biting. They infer that if the dog is allowed to play bite it will think of you as a littermate and will try to dominate you. This is nonsense. Play biting is an important part of your puppy's development and something that should be allowed and encouraged if you want your puppy to develop a soft mouth. Our goal is to teach the puppy to inhibit this natural canine behavior before they are adults and can cause serious injury.

When teaching bite inhibition, you want to initially target the hard bites.

Play with your puppy allowing him to mouth your hands while monitoring the pressure of his bites.

1. When the puppy bites too hard, say "yipe" or "ouch" as if he really hurt you. Note: you want to use the same word every time, as does everyone else in the family. This word is the conditioned stimulus which the puppy learns to mean "playtime ends."
2. Immediately stop play and get up and leave the room for about 20 to 30 seconds. You must completely ignore the puppy. Do NOT look at, touch or speak to the puppy, just walk away.
3. After a few minutes return and resume play. If the puppy bites too hard again, repeat steps 2 and 3.

The above cycle will need to be repeated several times for the puppy to learn. On a daily basis, you will reduce the amount of pressure you tolerate so that in time your puppy learns that you have very soft skin and he can only mouth you very gently. Be

careful of moving to a soft pressure too quickly. If your criteria are too high, you are setting your puppy up to fail.

Some puppies will follow you and nip at your heels and clothes when you stop play. If this is the case, the bite inhibition exercises should be done with the puppy on a leash. The other end of the leash is secured around something so the puppy cannot follow you.

The amount of time it takes your dog to learn how much pressure is okay will vary from dog to dog. The retrieving breeds generally pick this up quite quickly as they have been bred to have very soft mouths. Who wants to have their duck brought back all full of holes 😊.

If you want to have your children participate in the bite inhibition training, they need to be monitored by an adult at all times. While children and dogs often become the best of friends, young children frequently send dogs all the wrong signals. They scream, flail their limbs, run and fall down. All of these behaviors trigger your dogs hard-wired prey drive as they are essentially the same thing wounded prey would do. If the puppy gets too revved up, a timeout is necessary for both the puppy and the kids.

NOTE: If bite inhibition training was not started when your dog was a puppy, it may not work as well as you would like. If this is the case, please talk with one of the instructors for other ideas on handling biting issues.

Once your puppy has learned to control his bite, it is time to teach him a “no bite” prompt. We do that with the “Take It” and “Leave It” prompts.