

**OUCH!** Puppies explore the world with their mouths, so it's not unusual for puppies to explore your hands the same way. This is often referred to as "mouthing." Normal mouthing is soft, doesn't hurt, and most puppies grow out of it eventually. If your puppy likes to do this, don't be concerned. It will not cause aggression or other behavior problems. Play biting is also normal behavior for your puppy. It is how your puppy played with their littermates and how they learn to control the pressure of their bite. But when they do it to us, it can really hurt and even draw blood.

The usual advice like trading for a toy, saying "Ouch!" and other tips may seem to work at first, but the biting always comes back...sometimes worse than before. But you don't have to live out your life as a puppy pin cushion!

Curbing puppy biting takes a combination of prevention, positive training, and patience.

## AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION

The best approach is to prevent the biting as much as possible. We can do this by giving puppies outlets for biting, and managing the puppy's environment...and the puppy when necessary.

While it might seem like your puppy is biting "all the time," it usually happens around breakfast/dinner, when puppies are most active.

To prevent the biting, we want to take that energy and redirect it to better activities:

- Make meal times training times, using your puppy's breakfast or dinner as rewards
- Feed meals from interactive toys instead of a bowl
- Scatter meals around the room or in the yard for scavenging
- Soak puppy food in water or low-sodium broth and stuff inside a Kong™

One good positive training session or scavenger hunt can wear out even the craziest of puppies.

If biting happens at other times, what happened right before it starts? Once you know what triggers it, you can take steps to manage it.

For example, your puppy may start jumping and biting when the kids are playing. A temporary fix would be to put your puppy in their crate with a stuffed Kong™ while the kids play outside. Once your puppy is older and has some training, they can practice being calm in the yard with you.

## GIVE YOURSELF A BREAK

No one has the energy to practice puppy training all the time. It's okay to put your puppy in their pen or crate with a chew toy (see our "Home Alone: Confinement Training" handout for more) while you make dinner, put the kids to bed, or just need a minute. Just make sure your puppy has been out for a potty break first!

## WHEN THE BITING STARTS

Nobody's perfect. No matter how much prevention you do, play biting is going to happen from time to time – it's normal puppy behavior! How you respond is going to determine how quickly your puppy grows out of it.

### DON'T

- Yell or punish your puppy for play biting. This could cause your puppy to become fearful or frustrated, both of which can lead to bigger problems as they get older.
- “Yelp” or verbally reprimand. Play biting is how your puppy tries to get your attention. Looking, touching, and talking are all forms of attention and will reward the biting!
- Grab a toy as soon as your puppy starts biting you. This also rewards biting with attention.

### DO

- Stand up, cross your arms, and look away. Do it every time the biting starts. As soon as your puppy stops, praise and praise them or grab a toy and play.
- Use tools like baby gates and crates to manage your puppy around toddlers and young children, who aren't able to follow these rules consistently.

## HAVE PATIENCE

Puppy biting will not stop overnight. Puppies will eventually grow out of this phase as long as the biting isn't rewarded with attention.

But when puppy parents mix up different methods to try and stop the biting, they end up rewarding the biting with attention, making it last much longer.

Getting through this phase is a normal part of raising a puppy. Be patient and consistent, and it will end much faster.

## RECOMMENDED BOOKS

- *Puppy Start Right*, Kenneth and Debbie Martin
- *Social, Civil, and Savvy*, Laura VanArendonk Baugh

## WEBSITES FOR PARENTS

- [familypaws.com](http://familypaws.com)
- [livingwithkidsanddogs.com](http://livingwithkidsanddogs.com)

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**THE SACRAMENTO SPCA ANIMAL BEHAVIOR TEAM IS HERE TO HELP YOU!**

**BEHAVIOR HELPLINE: (916) 504-2848 OR [BEHAVIOR@SSPCA.ORG](mailto:BEHAVIOR@SSPCA.ORG)**

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