

GUIDE TO REDUCING PUPPY BITING



THE PUPPYHOOD SURVIVAL GUIDE FOR HUMANS

A guide to help build understanding of puppy behaviour, to support puppy-people in providing clear guidance for their puppy, and to help everyone survive puppy biting!

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PUPPIES BITE. DEAL WITH IT.

PUPPIES BITE. DEAL WITH IT.

And we're going to help you!



There is much ado about puppy biting; that and toilet training tend to be the most common cries for help from new puppy people.

Puppies use their mouths, as do dogs. And it's normal. Puppies use their mouths in communication, in entertainment, in exploration and education. If puppies are not doing these things, mouth first, we might be concerned about their health and development.

Here's the low down: puppies develop through this biting stage. If you do nothing and just put appropriate management in place, biting behaviour reduces and everyone moves on with their lives.

I'm not going to say puppy "*grows out of it*", because typically, puppies grow *into* problems and left unchecked, puppy biting may indicate or lead to more serious stuff.

The goal is not to stop puppy biting, just as we don't want to stop other normal puppy behaviour. Really, we just want to survive puppy biting and not make things worse.

NORMAL PUPPY BITING

Puppies start to intentionally bite their litter mates from about 2.5/3 weeks of age. As they begin to move about a little more, they will put their mouths on anything they can reach, and will bite each other, their mum, other dogs and humans they meet. If it fits, they will get their mouth on it!

When we take them home, usually at about 8 weeks of age, we interrupt puppies right in the middle of their bitiest period with their littermates (usually about 7-9 weeks).

Puppy biting is social behaviour and not related to teething. Indeed, it tends to reduce just as teething begins at about 14/15/16 weeks of age.

I tend to find that puppies are at their most bitey, with their new humans, from about 10-14 weeks. They've just started to settle into their new home and feeling a little more confident, they've lost access to most of their social outlets (their littermates) and they need to get their teeth sunk into any and all things.

Normal puppy biting goes away as puppies age; our work is aimed at preventing anything more serious developing.



NORMAL PUPPY BITING

Puppies have sharp little needle teeth (as if I need to tell you!) because they don't have a whole lot of jaw strength. So they need sharp teeth to make their point (!) in social interactions.

It's perfectly normal for puppies to use their teeth in social situations and they just need to use a little bite, without too much pressure, to gain social relief; they can get their brother or sister to give them a break.



WHAT'S NOT NORMAL?

Me telling you that puppy biting is normal behaviour might provide a little comfort, but largely isn't terribly helpful.

Puppy biting is certainly frustrating for humans, but the more tense or panicked we become, the more the biting escalates.

Of course, the harder puppy bites, the harder it is to stay calm; puppy bites harder and so an unhappy routine develops...and round and round we go.

I strongly recommend that all puppies and their people have qualified help to guide them through puppyhood and behavioural development. This will include programs in place to help with puppy biting and monitoring of their biting behaviour.

The vast majority of pet owners I talk with think that *their* puppy's behaviour is terribly dangerous, intense and aggressive even when their puppy is demonstrating normal puppy biting.

While puppy biting is normal, necessary and natural behaviour, there might be times when puppy biting behaviour warrants more concern. For example, the following:

- generally normal behaviour might be of concern when expressed at unusual, increased or decreased frequencies, intensities, severity etc. so if biting increases and seems a disproportionate response, seek help
- puppy is growling, stiffening and biting when physically manipulated, restrained, moved or picked up
- puppy is growling, stiffening and biting when items are removed from them, such as chews, toys or 'stolen' items, or when approached when puppy has such items
- you often note puppy stiffening and growling before biting
- growls, vocalises, hides from, snaps and/or bites new people
- directs growling, snapping, biting behaviour toward children

Common types of normal puppy biting:

- **chewing on you:** often happens when puppy is quite calm; they might chew on your hands or fingers, sometimes manoeuvring your knuckle on to their back teeth
This is usually comfort seeking.
- **relief-seeking biting:** often happens during interactions that involve physical contact, manipulation or restraint. Puppy wants to be free, finds the interaction and handling unpleasant, and is asking for distance and relief. They will usually aim their biting at your hands, or the harness or brush you are using.
- **land-shark** (as in your puppy turns into a land-shark doo doo doo doo doo doo) They might bite repeatedly, biting may appear as to come out of nowhere, they might jump and bite, and may vocalise and growl.
This often happens when puppy is over-stimulated and over-tired.

On top of those three biting categories, puppies will often bite at and chase feet, trousers and other clothing, and even hands that are moving and flailing.

That's a lot of biting!

WHY IS BITING NORMAL FOR PUPPIES?

WHY IS BITING NORMAL BEHAVIOUR FOR PUPPIES?

Puppy biting happens because puppies are immature youngsters, just learning to navigate their world, who are not terribly well coordinated.

They haven't yet developed mature communication systems and skills. When puppies bite, they are seeking something, making a request, trying to communicate their needs. And because they lack mature communication skills, they don't have other ways to ask for a break, or a rest, or just time to process.

Dogs, including puppies, are often comforted by having things in their mouths. They might seek out sensory pay off by biting or holding something in their mouths when they are stressed, excited, and wound up.

Puppies often bite more and harder when they are over-stimulated, over-tired and just over everything, needing a break and a rest.

WHENS & WHYS

The first job, for you, on the road to managing, preventing and reducing biting, and stopping it getting worse, is analysing the whens and whys of biting.

Can you match whens with whys for your puppy?

List out the times **when** biting happens. What's going on, who's present, what's just happened?

- puppy bites during games
- during, after and in anticipation of something exciting happening
- when you hug them, hold them, pick them up, restrain them
- when you groom them or try to put on their gear
- in the evening
- when people come home or come down in the morning

From this, we can look at the **whys** of biting; why is your puppy biting and what are they getting out of it. Remember, dogs, and even puppies, do behaviours that work!

Puppies bite:

- to gain social relief so the humans remove the social pressure
- so that you move away, leave them alone, give them space and a break
- for attention and interaction
- for sensory pay off
- to help them improve their comfort and get their excitement under control
- to gain access to things or places

Every interaction with your puppy is a learning opportunity; your behaviour makes biting more or less likely to happen immediately and over time.

WHAT NOT TO DO

Don't:

- yell
- "NO!"
- yelp or startle
- slap, hit or "tap" anywhere on puppy's body
- push away
- attempt to physically restrain or hold their collar
- push their lips into their teeth
- pinch
- spray
- pin or roll
- scruff

Don't do the above or similar, and if you have started, stop now.

WHAT NOT TO DO

There's no such thing as 'bad' behaviour and your biting puppy is most certainly not a bad puppy. Puppy biting is normal, we just happen to find it unpleasant! Generally, the more you force, the more biting there will be.

Young puppies, in this biting stage, are also going through some very important behavioural development.

Adding force, startle, intimidation, and suppression may have implications for that puppy's behavioural responding in their future.

All the work we do with puppies during this stage has ramifications later on; this work is an investment in your puppy's future, in the dog you will have in 2 years, 5 years, 10 years.

Just stopping puppy biting isn't the goal. Preventing puppy practicing biting is our jam; that way you're not a pin cushion and puppy is not learning to use their mouth to get out of socially pressuring situations with humans.

Teach don't threaten. Prevent rather than punish.

Puppy people who do these things to their puppies are not bad people; we are not in the business of blame or force for puppy people, just as we avoid it for puppies.

There are all sorts of connotations in our culture about dogs putting their teeth on human skin and puppy biting HURTS! New puppy people are worried about their puppy; it can be frightening and confusing, and not knowing what's best to do can cause humans to respond rashly.

It's ok. When you know better, you do better. We will support you and your puppy; it's a team effort.

A new puppy person might also feel pulled in different directions; everyone has advice and knows best when you get your puppy.

The information here is evidence based, as up to date as you'll get, and based on thousands upon thousands of hours of puppy training, puppy rearing, and puppy-people education.

Whatever advice you choose, be consistent. Be predictable. Teach your puppy what to expect from interactions with you.

Work through our program. Consistently.



I tend not to recommend puppy classes because so many are a free for all, and for the same reasons, I don't think daycares or dog parks are ideal for supporting appropriate behavioural development in dogs.

But I do like to set up short outings or meetings for puppy, with appropriate adult dogs, rather than lots of other puppies or young dogs. Giving puppy social outlets for biting with other dogs, may help with the underlying motivation for puppy biting behaviour, providing these interactions are carefully supervised.



We are not trying to stop biting; we just want to survive this biting phase and not make things worse. Our approach will reduce biting over time, and most importantly, open and develop channels of communication and trust between you and your puppy, while helping them develop life skills.

Consistency is our goal; one of these tools alone will not work over night. The program works as a whole, over time. Puppy raising is a marathon, not a sprint! Rather than concentrating on specific training exercises, we are *living* this program. **Every interaction with your puppy is an opportunity for learning.**

1. PREVENTION

Go back to your whens and whys analysis. What can your puppy expect from these interactions?

You coming home and puppy anticipates great excitement...biting at the ready!

- Redirect them by tossing food rewards or produce a toy as soon as you come in the door so puppy has something to do, other than bite.



You trying to fit their harness and puppy anticipates discomfort....biting at the ready!

- Use food rewards and toys to keep the bitey end of puppy busy.



You can see where we're going with this...

Avoid putting puppy in those situations that anticipate biting. Practice *not* getting bitten.

2. THREE-COUNT INTERACTIONS

Your puppy probably doesn't want to be picked up, hugged and touched a whole lot...it's a bubble I burst for a lot of new puppy people! In general, this is a primate thing and not really a dog thing.

Plus you've just met your puppy and you don't know one another that well yet. Learn to work hands-off, use your food, use your toys and use your engagement to encourage puppy, rather than going straight to putting your hands on.

If your hands are not on puppy, there will be a lot less biting.

Let puppy *choose* how much touching and handling they want. And help them learn to expect choice in interactions with humans by practising in all interactions with your puppy.



The rules for interacting with puppy:

- wait for puppy to come to you
- work low down and keep your hands low
- have a treat in your hand for puppy to lick at in your hand
- one hand on puppy at a time only
- touch puppy in the area closest to your hand (usually their shoulder area) and pet gently for a 3-count
- withdraw and ask if puppy would like more

3. ROLLERCOASTER GAMES

Rollercoaster Games help your puppy come up in excitement, and then come down again for calm. This primes their systems to better cope with stress and the daily swings of life.

This is how you play with puppy. Short and sweet.

Rollercoaster Games, played properly, teaches puppy to release an item too, which can help with asking puppy to let go of you or your clothing.



Think of your puppy's day, and all their interactions, like a Rollercoaster. If we bring 'em up, we gotta help them come down again.

The best ways to bring puppy down is to provide sniffing, lapping, and chewing. After any sort of excitement, help your puppy regain some control, without biting you, by facilitating some sniffing, then lapping and chewing.

4. APPROPRIATE ENRICHMENT, EXERCISE & ENTERTAINMENT



Your puppy probably doesn't need too much more excitement in their life; puppies find everything exciting and they tend to have big feelings all over the place.

Make Rollercoaster Games, sniffing, exploration and chewing the main forms of exercise that puppies get.



They don't need to high octane play or meetings. Social and environmental exposure should be about puppy learning that their world around them is no big deal, rather than cause for alarm or excitement.



If you want to survive puppyhood, start #100daysofenrichment today! This is a free 100-day training program that will support all of this and provide your puppy with beneficial and appropriate enrichment.

Get started by scanning this QR code!

5. HANDS ARE NOT FOR BITING

Instead of hands being for biting, turn hands into instruments of rewards!

Smear rewards on to your palms so the presentation of hands anticipates licking and lapping, rather than biting. Use wet food, cream cheese, yoghurt, peanut butter or liver pate as training rewards. Present your palm low down for puppy to lick. Regular practice will help change puppy's expectations from biting to licking.

Hand feed your puppy. Teach them to expect that hands will produce food rewards that are lapped up or tossed for sniffing or chasing.



Teach a hand target behaviour so puppy learns that hands are for bopping and then moving away. This also becomes a nifty way of redirecting and moving puppy without having to put hands on.

To view video examples, open the QR reader app/camera on your smartphone & scan the codes above.



6. REST & ROUTINE

Puppies, much like babies, thrive with a structured routine of feeding, resting, play and sleep.

Puppies should have about 18-20 hours of sleep a day! Most puppies, with whom I work who show lots of biting, are simply not getting enough rest. Think about a rest to activity ratio for your puppy; for most puppies a 3:1 or 2:1 rest: activity units is appropriate. For example, 40-60 minutes rest to 20 minutes activity.

Puppies will often need help coming down from excitement so that they can rest properly and then they need a comfy resting place where they know they won't be disturbed.

Once puppy's needs are met, teach them how to settle and establish a settle-context.

Make sure puppies are warm, fed, toileted and have a cuddle-buddy for naps. Give them a large soft toy to snuggle with; this is especially helpful for very young puppies and for overnight.

Provide puppy with a stuffable toy or irresistible chew to help them soothe and calm, as they drift off.



7. MANAGEMENT & CONFINEMENT

I can't recommend confinement training enough; you might work with a crate, a baby gate, a puppy pen. Whatever you use, do it. Confinement train puppies properly so that they are comfortable with being behind a barrier. This is a life skill.

But confinement training (done right) can be really helpful in preventing biting, providing puppy with a quiet place of their own to rest, and helps puppy to learn about frustration tolerance and self-calming. A puppy behind a barrier can't bite you and you can move away or closer, rewarding puppy's behaviour appropriately.

Having puppy in their pen when the kids come in or when the household is moving about is perfect for preventing biting during this excitement.

This allows you to reinforce calm behaviour, by tossing food rewards, while keeping everyone safe and reducing biting-practice.



Letting puppy drag a light line, just on their collar, may allow you to move or restrain puppy, without having to put hands on. Make sure puppy only wears their line when supervised, otherwise they will get tangled or chew it.

LET'S NOT RELY ON "TIME OUTS"

A confinement area also gives you a place to put puppy when the biting gets too much. We will NOT be relying on a "time-out" approach; why would we want to apply a punisher to puppy's attempts at communication?

But, when puppy has turned into a full-on land-shark it's understandable that you might need a break.

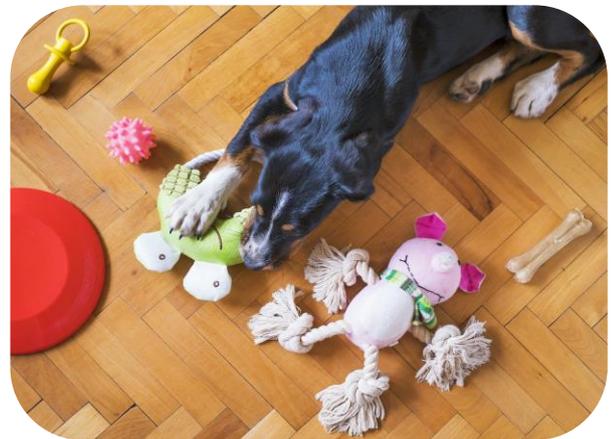
Instead of picking puppy up and placing them somewhere, you storm off, as if mortally wounded, for about 20 seconds just to give everyone a chance to calm down.

If biting starts again as soon as you return, puppy needs some down time. Prepare a yummy stuffable toy and settle them down for a nap, ideally in a suitable confinement area.

8. TOYS & CHEWS

Have lots of things to entertain puppy. I'm not talking about just boring rubber balls, rawhide and rope toys lying around. You need a range of interesting toys that allow your puppy to express a range of behaviours. Rotate them regularly (every couple days) and just have 3-5 available at a time.

For tugging and redirection, my favourites are chaser fur toys or faux fur, if you prefer. (We love the Tug-E-Nuff range of Chaser Toys.) These are special toys that are just for these types of interactions.



Give your puppy an **Activity Box**, a good sized shallow box that you leave on the floor for puppy. Add a toy, a stuffable and some safe items of interest such as cardboard tubes or crumpled paper. Rotate items frequently and it doesn't matter if they destroy the box or its contents just watch your puppy for ingestion or other hazards.

Redirect puppy to their Activity Box when you need to change their focus from biting or being silly.

Puppies need lots and lots of things to chew. And variety is important too. Have a range of chews that are updated as puppy develops and rotate them regularly.



9. TEACH

Instead of how to stop behaviour, instead think *what would you prefer puppy to do?*

Maybe we would prefer puppy to engage with a toy instead, let go of you when asked, or ignore your trouser leg or shoelace.

We can teach those behaviours.



Check out our piece on developing a program for foot chasing, which helps you implement these teachings, by scanning this QR code.





10. COMMUNICATION

Putting this program in place consistently, helps you to learn to listen to your puppy and respond appropriately.

Learn puppy's signs and relevant contexts. What tells you that puppy is becoming overwhelmed and that biting is imminent?

Be proactive and redirect puppy to a sniffing or chewing task, play some Rollercoaster Games to let them release some energy or excitement, give them a break and allow them to do their own thing, set them up for a nap.

What other proactive things can you put in place to help your puppy, and prevent biting?

YOUR TO DO LIST

1. Analyse the whens & whys of biting behaviour
2. Provide appropriate social outlets with other suitable dogs
3. Choose a plan & implement consistently
4. Use your analysis to prevent biting-whens & biting-whys
5. Three-count Interactions
6. Rollercoaster Games
7. Appropriate enrichment, exercise & entertainment
8. Hands are not for biting
9. Rest & Routine
10. Management & Confinement
11. Toys & Chews
12. Teach
13. Communication

KIDS & PUPPY BITING



Kids and dogs can be a tricky mix, especially with busy family lifestyles and high expectations. We could talk all day about child-dog safety, but here, we are just covering children and puppy biting.

Kids, especially small children, are often the focus of intense puppy biting. And normal child behaviour plus normal puppy behaviour can make parenting challenging. I often don't recommend puppies for young children because kids can become scared of puppy, and that relationship can be tough to repair.

Adding a puppy is like adding another toddler to the family so best be prepared for some serious education for the whole family!

WHY DO PUPPIES BITE KIDS SO MUCH?

We already know that puppy biting behaviour is completely normal dog behaviour, and absolutely normal child behaviour is often the cause of extra puppy biting.

But there are lots of things we can do to prevent and reduce puppy biting through lots of careful management and adult supervision.

Children are shorter, and often on the floor, and more easily within reach for puppies.

Most importantly, children are more likely to behave in a manner that over-excites and overwhelms puppies.

Just like puppies, children might not be terribly coordinated, and they might not realise that they are

making puppy feel uncomfortable or scared.

Children might be more likely to unintentionally exert social pressure on dogs, for example, holding them, staring at them, taking things from them and so on.

Kids may tease puppies, often unintentionally, and may treat their new puppy as they might a stuffed toy.

Puppy will begin to anticipate feeling this way in response to kids, and biting is imminent!



KIDS & PUPPY BITING

The goal is for kids and puppies to be able to share space rather than having intense or exciting interactions. Dogs love children with whom they can share space!

That's what socialisation *should* produce: social neutrality; kids are no big deal and puppies can cope with their presence.



Puppy people with children in the home, or visiting regularly, must have a program in place.

Consider carefully the whens and whys of biting the children and prevent puppy being put in those situations.

Use confinement and designate child-zones and dog-zones so that everyone has safe space.

Prioritise making space-sharing possible. Set kids and puppies up with their own calm and engaging activities so that they learn to just be with one another.

BABIES:

There is no reason for puppy to have contact with baby. Set puppy up with calming and engaging activities when baby is present, such as sniffing, puzzles, stuffables and chews. Puppy learns that baby means all is calm, they learn to busy and settle themselves and develop a positive, calm attitude to baby and baby related activities. Always supervise dogs and kids directly and actively, or confine puppy elsewhere.



TODDLERS:

Baby gates and plenty of separation are best for puppies and toddlers. Careful management is important when toddlers are move around and active.

Toddlers might like to participate in feeding puppy, putting together puzzles, tossing food for sniffing and rewarding. Puppy learns that approaching a toddler gets them to toss food away, giving puppy distance and reducing biting.

Use guided touch to help toddler learn how to touch puppy and practice 3-count interactions with puppies.

Always supervise dogs and kids directly and actively, or confine puppy elsewhere.

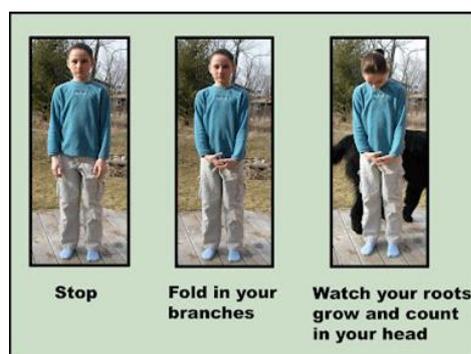


CHILDREN:

As children develop, and their coordination and comprehension improves, they will be able to participate more and more in puppy care. This helps puppy and child to develop a wonderful relationship and the child's developing awareness helps reduce biting.

Kids love to keep records, they can weigh out puppy's food, and supervise other household members in training and interactions with puppy.

Teach children to Be A Tree when puppy chases or jumps.



KIDS & PUPPY BITING



SCAN THE QR CODES BELOW FOR VIDEO DEMONSTRATIONS OF EXERCISES FOR KIDS AND PUPPIES

Teach children about the rules for interacting with puppy and 3-count interactions



Take care introducing Rollercoaster Games for kids and puppies. Supervise and guide carefully! TUG!



Hand targeting is a simple exercise, for puppies and kids!



Guide children in teaching others about 3-count interactions!



Take care introducing Rollercoaster Games for kids and puppies. Supervise and guide carefully! FOLLOW-ME/FREEZE!



Kids learn to capture behaviour other than biting in contexts where biting might happen, like in the kitchen!



With guidance, kids can learn to teach their puppies to walk nicely with them, engage and deliver reinforcement. To avoid arguments, tagteam training works too!



Short sessions of fun and activity, after some foundations, can be a great way to build fun and relationship, while also teaching puppy how to have fun without biting.



Kids learn to capture behaviour other than biting in contexts where biting might happen like when the child sits quietly or eats.



Our expectations of both puppies and kids can be unrealistic.

When getting a puppy, you will be doing the work, while guiding, managing, supervising, and providing education for both kids and puppies. On a repetitive and ongoing basis...

Puppies will need as much care and parenting as children!



GUIDE TO REDUCING PUPPY BITING

Most puppies come home when they are less than 60 days old. They have not been on the planet very long and couldn't be expected to have any idea how to behave in the human world. There will of course be clashes between what's normal for dogs and what's acceptable for humans. But, we're the ones with the big primate brain capable of guiding and teaching our pets, and most importantly, providing them with acceptable outlets for their behaviour.

In summary:

- puppy biting is normal, just like tail wagging or barking
- puppies use their mouths in all sorts of ways
- puppy biting is social behaviour, rather than teething-related
- normal puppy biting reduces over time, usually by about four months of age
- we are not working to stop puppy biting; we work to reduce and redirect, and prevent anything more serious developing
- puppies bite to communicate their needs
- seek help for puppy biting and puppy education
- When does puppy bite? Change what puppy might expect from those contexts by setting up more appropriate activities for them.
- don't apply force, intimidation, fright or pain; take a deep breath, walk away, give puppy a stuffable toy and have a break...puppy rearing can be tough and you will survive this!
- be consistent
- work hands-off and keep the bite end of puppy busy; practice not getting bitten
- don't rely on "time outs"
- be consistent; work through our program, choose tools and adapt as you go

WHAT DOES PUPPY NEED WHEN THE BITING STARTS?

- hands off
- redirect by tossing food rewards away or create a diversion (e.g. rustle packaging, open the fridge, get their lead)
- make biting a toy appealing by wagging it
- bring them for a toilet break
- play some Rollercoaster Games
- facilitate sniffing and exploration
- leave them to their own devices (once safe)
- provide sniffing fun and puzzles
- give them their favourite chews and stuffables
- some downtime, a nap, rest and relief

PUPPIES BITE. AND MANY PUPPIES BITE A LOT.

TAKE A BREATH AND REMIND YOURSELF THAT THIS IS NORMAL. DON'T TAKE IT PERSONALLY; YOUR PUPPY IS NOT TRYING TO DOMINATE YOU ('COS, WHAT THEN?!) OR HURT YOU.

HANG IN THERE. THIS WILL GET BETTER. YOUR WOUNDS WILL HEAL, AND YOU AND YOUR PUPPY WILL BUILD A WONDERFUL RELATIONSHIP TOGETHER.

Further resources:

Instinct Dog Behavior & Training: the Dogs & Kids course. A free online course for all those juggling kids and dogs!



Puppy Biting Checklist download from What a Great Dog! Training Center



6 Reasons your puppy is biting you infographic



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