



Puppy Chewing

Higgeldy, piggeldy, pop

The dog has eaten the mop.

So goes a children's rhyme according to the venerable Mother Goose. And so goes many a mop according to frustrated mothers who clean up after playful pooches.

Every family that has taken a dog into its heart has suffered the destructiveness of needle-sharp teeth that demolish dolls and seat cushions, splinter furniture and door frames, and tear bedspreads and party hose. That such a tiny bundle of fur could be responsible for such waste is beyond belief.

Almost.

Puppies chew to ease teething discomfort, to play, to explore their environment, to assuage hunger, to establish dominance, and to relieve boredom. Families can plan a response to active puppy teeth that will soften the impact on possessions and limbs while the pup is growing.

SOME SUGGESTIONS

- **Buy Blackjack several toys he can chew on.** Busy Buddy toys such as Squirrel Dudes or Kong brand toys are the best. These toys have places to hide treats or kibble, so that they engage your puppy's attention, and reward them for playing with them (when they get bits of the treat or kibble). These can keep your puppy's attention for hours and can keep that attention directed at an appropriate item. DO NOT offer your puppy old shoes or clothing or toys that are shaped like anything he shouldn't be chewing on. He will get confused between the discarded items and a pair of \$100 Nikes. Soft squeak toys are fun for small puppies and for games of fetch, but are not sturdy enough for chewing exercise for older pups.
- **Whenever Taffy chews the wrong thing, remove her to a neutral area and give her something she's allowed to chew.** No shouting, no smacks with a newspaper or hand—just matter-of-fact corrections in a firm tone of voice.
- **Confine Fritz to his kennel when you cannot watch him.** A confined pet cannot chew the furniture. Make sure he has a toy in the crate that will occupy his attention.
- **Limit access to bedrooms, living rooms, etc. with baby gates and/or closed doors.**
- **Puppies must learn the difference between play biting or exploring their environment and biting to establish dominance.** Puppies and older dogs who play will frequently growl and nip one another as part of their roughhousing. Occasionally one will nip the other too hard. The injured party will yipe loudly and run away, discontinuing play. This will leave the Fido to wonder what he did wrong and how it can be fixed. Next time, he won't nip so hard, or at all. This is how puppies learn to develop a "soft mouth." You can react in a similar fashion. If Fido nips too hard, you can yipe loudly and walk away from play. You can return a few minutes later and start again. Discontinued play is a very powerful message for a puppy.
- **If you cannot stop your puppy from nipping on crawling babies or toddlers, separate the dog from the children.** Don't fall for the old "he doesn't really mean it" when Ranger nips or growls at the kids. It doesn't matter what he meant—he's not allowed to put his teeth on babies. Ever.
- **Puppies that are allowed to rule the roost with teeth and growl will turn into dogs that do the same.** Don't be intimidated by puppy growling, and don't overreact. As Daisy learns the appropriate responses, the growling will cease.

- **Join in a game of retrieve or Frisbee.** Be sure to teach “bring it” and “give it” so you don’t end up chasing Duke through several counties to get the ball back. These commands come in handy when the pup steals Mary’s slippers or snitches an ornament of the Christmas tree as well. Put Duke on a leash to teach the retrieve game so you can guide him back and get the ball. Grasp the ball firmly with one hand and open his mouth by placing the other hand over his muzzle and pushing in on his lips to protect your fingers from his teeth. Say “give” and open his mouth to remove the toy.
- **Each time you give Molly a treat, say “take it” before she puts it in her mouth.** Grabbing is not allowed. When Molly has mastered “sit,” she should do so before the toy or treat is offered.
- **Be cautious with playing tug-of-war.** If you give up the game, Rambo wins and advances up the leadership ladder. If you pull the rope from his teeth, you may hurt his tender young mouth. Puppies that learn to play tug-of-war frequently look at any moving piece of clothing as fair game.
- **Teach children that puppies must never be encouraged to chase or bite.** Collies, Corgis, Shelties, and other herding breeds may try to round up children by nipping at their heels, but this, too, is unacceptable. Herding pups may exhibit this behavior, but owners should not allow it to continue.
- **Positive reinforcement training is much more effective for training than punishment.** Rewarding good behavior will earn quicker results than punishing bad behavior ever will. Puppies should never be hit.
- **Be persistent and consistent. If it is wrong yesterday, it is wrong today.** Sit down with your family and decide together how your puppy will be trained—get everyone on the same page about training, commands, rewards and discipline. In this way, your puppy will receive the same treatment and training from everyone with little confusion.

The millions of dogs destroyed at animal shelters are a testimony to the myth that good relationships with dogs develop automatically. You can avoid many of the behavior problems that often result in abandonment by doing some basic training to teach Rover to inhibit his bite reflex.

For more information about bite inhibition and other training tools, please refer to *After You Get Your Puppy*, by Dr. Ian Dunbar.

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