

ADULT DOGS WHO MOUTH & NIP

Puppies spend a lot of time playing, chewing and investigating objects — including people! Adult dogs who mouth people probably never learned not to mouth as puppies. It's likely that they weren't taught by their human parents during puppyhood how to be gentle or to chew toys instead. As a result, they continue to mouth, even though they're now mature.

How to Stop Your Dog's Mouthing

Your dog must learn to go out of their way to avoid putting their teeth on human skin or clothing. Here's how to teach them:

- Whenever your dog's teeth touch your skin — no matter where on your body and regardless of whether it actually hurts — immediately yell "Ouch!" as if you're hurt. Aim for a surprised tone rather than an angry one. Then quickly turn your back to your dog and ignore them for a 15-second time-out. If they continue to mouth or nip, get up and move away or even out of the room for 10 seconds.
- After the timeout, turn back toward your dog and resume whatever you were doing, whether greeting or playing together with a toy.
- If your dog bites you again, yell "Ouch!" again. Repeat these steps consistently each time you feel your dog's teeth on your skin or clothing.
- End play or interaction entirely after your third "Ouch!" Leave the room or put your dog in a crate, outside or in another room.

Key Tips

- Be sure that the room is "dog-proofed" before you leave your dog alone in it. Don't leave them with things that they can destroy or have fun with. Alternatively, you can keep a leash attached to your dog during training and let it drag on the floor. Then, instead of leaving the room when your dog mouths you, take hold of the leash and lead them to a quiet area, tether them and turn your back for the brief time-out. Then untie them and resume whatever you were doing.
- If 15-second timeouts don't reduce your dog's mouthing after a couple of sessions, try longer timeouts, like 30 to 60 seconds.
- Substitute a toy or chew bone when your dog tries to gnaw on fingers or toes.
- Dogs often mouth people's hands when stroked, patted and scratched. If your dog gets riled up when you pet them, distract them with small treats given from your other hand or a toy. This helps your dog get used to being touched without mouthing you.
- Encourage noncontact forms of play, such as fetch and tug-of-war, rather than wrestling and rough play with your hands. Ask us for our handout on tug guidelines to be sure the game is both fun and educational for your dog. Once your dog can

play tug safely, keep tug toys in your pocket or have them nearby. If your dog starts to mouth you, you can quickly redirect them to the tug toy. Ideally, they'll start to anticipate and look for a toy whenever they feel like mouthing.

- If your dog bites at your feet and ankles, carry their favorite tug toy in your pocket. Whenever they ambush you, stop moving your feet and wait for them to stop biting. The second they stop, praise them and whip out the tug toy, waving it enticingly to encourage play. When your dog grabs the toy, start moving again. Repeat these steps until your dog gets used to seeing you move around without going after your feet or ankles.
- If your dog mouths and bites at greetings, such when you arrive home after an absence, keep a favorite toy or two right by the front door. When you arrive, grab the toy and hold it behind your back, then ask your dog to sit. The moment they sit, reward them by tossing the toy. Turning the greeting into play helps positively redirect all your dog's excitement toward the toy rather than on mouthing and jumping on you.
- Provide plenty of interesting and new toys so that your dog will play with them instead of gnawing on you or your clothing.
- Provide lots of opportunities for your dog to play with friendly adult dogs. They can expend a lot of energy playing with dogs and have less need to play roughly with you.
- If timeouts aren't effective, consider using a taste deterrent, such as Grannick's Bitter Apple. Spray areas of your body and clothing that your dog likes to mouth before you start interacting with them. If they mouth you or your clothing, stop moving and wait for them to react to the bad taste of the deterrent. Praise them when they let go of you. Apply the bad taste to your body and clothes for at least two weeks. After two weeks of being punished by the bitter taste every time they mouth you, your dog will likely learn to inhibit their mouthy behavior.

General Precautions

- Waving your hands in your dog's face or slapping the sides of their face will not entice them to play.
- Don't discourage play with you altogether. Play is fun, good exercise, and builds a strong bond between you and your dog. Just stick to noncontact games like tug and fetch.
- Slapping or hitting dogs for mouthing can cause them to bite harder or play more aggressively. Being physically hard and forceful with dogs often teaches them to become hard and forceful right back at us. Physical punishment can also make your dog afraid of you or your hands and can even cause aggression. Avoid scruff shaking, hitting your dog's nose, sticking your fingers down their throat, or any kind of punishment.