



Puppy Mouthing Behavior Part 1: The Basics

Puppy mouthing is a normal part of a young dog's development. Puppies teethe until about 5 or 6 months of age. During that time they need chewing outlets.

Below are some helpful tips for living with a mouthy puppy.

- **Make sure you have LOTS of appropriate chew toy options on hand.** These ideally are at least the length of your forearm to keep your hands away from the side your puppy will grab. Toys like rope toys, squeaky tug toys, and long rubber tug toys are ideal. You can also offer lots of hard/rubber chew toys, and/or frozen treats. See our *Canine Enrichment* handout for ideas.
- **When you can anticipate your puppy's excitement, offer them a toy or enrichment item!** Try to be ready with the toy before they put their mouth on you. Encourage them to play by making the toy move invitingly away from them. The message we want to send is, "Why would you want to put your mouth on me when you could have this awesome toy instead?"
- **Preemptively teach your puppy foundation behaviors like "sit," "down," or "touch."** Offering a puppy's brain something to do can burn as much energy as offering a physical activity, and adds more opportunities for them to be successful. See our *Clicker Basics* and *Touch Targeting* handouts for details!
- **If your puppy does put their mouth on you, stand up and stop giving them attention.** If your puppy continues to mouth, step behind a doorway or other barrier (baby gate or exercise pen). Wait until the puppy is doing something more desirable (4 feet on the floor, sitting, etc.) before reengaging them with an appropriate toy. The message we want to send is, "If you play appropriately, the fun continues! If the human feels teeth, the fun stops."
- **Heavily PREEMPTIVELY reward desirable behaviors all times throughout the day.** Anytime your puppy spontaneously offers a sit or down, greets you without jumping, or does anything else you like, treat, praise, and/or play with them. Reinforce what you want to see more of, *anytime you see it!*
- **Recognize your puppy's peak hours.** Early in the morning when you first wake up and later in the evening before bed, your puppy will likely become more energetic. Make sure to be ready for their bursts of energy!
- **Invest in a flirt pole (aka woof stick).** These toys are like long cat toys for dogs with a pole, a rope, and a toy at the end. They are designed to let your puppy chase the toy and burn energy without

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tiring *you* out. Teach useful behaviors around the game, such as “take it” and “drop it” to prevent them from redirecting excitement onto you! These toys are available for purchase or can be made DIY style.

- **Avoid punishing or scolding your puppy.** Counterintuitively, these methods often increase the amount of nipping. Mouthy puppies are often soliciting attention and play, so scolding or pushing them away can be misinterpreted as both. It can also increase frustration, which may in turn lead to venting frustration with their mouth.
- **Enroll them in a puppy training class!** Structured training can help you bond, learn to communicate effectively with your new puppy, socialize your puppy effectively, and can give you the opportunity to ask your trainer questions in real time. Check out [East Bay SPCA’s Puppy Stars class](#).

