



Puppy Mouthing Part 2: Practical Examples

If you're ready to dive deeper into puppy training! Below are some training tips that can help you get started:

Step 1: Environmental Management

Aka, setting up the environment so that your training has the best chance of success! It's important to approach training strategies while considering what in the environment might be contributing to the behavior.

- 1. Change the environment, change the behavior.** Essentially, this means trying to set up the environment so that whatever behavior you don't want has the smallest chance of occurring, while trying to meet the original need of the behavior. Examine your puppy's daily routine and see if there are changes you can make. This won't be a forever change, but just as young children don't get access to certain areas until they've learned safe habits, we don't want to set up our puppies to fail. Some examples might be:
 - a. Walking your puppy at places/times where there *lots of opportunities for SNIFFING*. Sniffing might seem a poor second to exercise in terms of helping a dog relax, but the science sides with sniffing over exertion! (See our *Decompress for Success* handout for more details)
 - b. During challenging times, *set up your puppy behind an exercise pen with a REALLY exciting enrichment food puzzle*. That way, they are more interested in their food than trying to mouth you, and while they still get to be nearby, the exercise pen or gate prevents them from mugging you. It also helps to normalize relaxing during certain times.
 - c. *Setting up a pen or gate in a "bubble" around your front door* so that you can remove access to jumping during high excitement entries and exits.
 - d. *Set up "Surprise Supplies" around your house*. These are stashes of jars or other containers of non-perishable treats such as freeze-dried meat in places you know you will want them on hand, so that you can be ready to reinforce (reward) desirable behavior anywhere!
- 2. Explore enrichment!** One of the quickest ways for young dogs to get overexcited is through frustration. Just like young children, *they need things to keep them busy*, and if they don't have them, they'll go looking for them! Here are some examples of how to work your puppy's brain:
 - a. *Food puzzles/food enrichment*. See our *Constructive Canine Enrichment* handout for ideas!
 - b. *Biothane longlines* (aka extra-long leashes) so you can give your puppy lots of room to run out in the world while still having the safety of a leash. These are great for building confidence and practicing leash walking. Our favorite brand is hightailhikes.com. We prefer these to

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retractable leashes for safety and building loose leash skills (retractables can encourage dogs to pull into pressure).

- c. *Environmental enrichment*. Order an Amazon package? Got paper grocery bags from the store? Got junk spam mail? Finish a roll of toilet paper or paper towels? Turn them into “legal” tear-able toys!

Step 2: Training

Aka, actual exercises and training games that will teach our puppies new skills and new habits. If you want a refresher on how to use a marker (clicker) to train using positive reinforcement, check out our *Clicker Basics* handout, or view our *Clicker Training 101* webinar. Here are a few examples of foundation exercises:

1. **Reinforce an existing puppy!** During high excitement moments when your puppy is near (but not over!) threshold, your lowest bar is simply...not biting you! They’re just existing. Here is a video example of capturing “4 feet on the floor” (aka, NOT jumping and mouthing 😊): [Video example: Four on the Floor](#)
2. Practicing lowering excitement level during play. [Here is a video](#) illustrating how to use treats to interrupt tug play and turn it into a capturing session.
3. Happy feet! Sometimes even our movements can be exciting enough to trigger mouthing! Another thing you can click for is simply staying calm while you move around. [Example video](#) of practicing reinforcing calm behaviors while feet are moving.

Step 3: Example training plan

So what does that look like when we put environmental management and training together? Here’s an example of a possible training plan:

Undesirable behavior: Excitement mouthing

We have 3 goals:

1. **Figure out when the mouthing will occur.**
2. **Set up the environment so that mouthing has the least likelihood of occurring.**
3. **Be ready to preemptively reward ALTERNATIVE behaviors consistently so that they become habits.**

Try tracking WHEN this mouthing is most likely to occur! There are often patterns of behavior that we can miss during our daily routine. But if we get wise to the patterns, *we can prepare for them before they happen.*

Here’s an example scenario (numbered as above):

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1. Mouthing is likely to occur (ex) when you are getting ready in the bathroom.
2. Have a baby gate or exercise pen against the wall so that you can open it up between you and your puppy. Have a “surprise supplies” jar with treats ready. Approach the barrier, treat scatter first! Your puppy will move away to eat the scattered treats. THEN:
3. Any time your puppy sits (or simply has 4 feet on the floor!) toss a treat AWAY for them to find. If they jump, don't react, simply wait from behind the protected contact, and then catch them getting it right! Over time, begin to fade out the barrier. *If possible, try to PREEMPT the jumping by reinforcing 4 on the floor as they re-approach you! This is why we toss the treat AWAY.*
 - a. Repeat preemptively each morning. If done consistently, you getting ready in the bathroom can now become a cue for them to offer desirable behaviors!

Managing Expectations

Understand that it takes time to build up new habits, *especially if they've been practicing the behavior* for a while. But the work on the front end is well worth it! Stick with it, be consistent, and don't be afraid to reach out for help!

NOTE: Mouthing behaviors are *likely to increase with EXCITEMENT!* If you notice your puppy getting very excited (play, barking, running, etc.) try to be ready with toys and treats BEFORE the mouthing occurs. *We don't want to teach them that mouthing you means you shower him with treats or offer them a toy!* If you can't be ready, try a management strategy instead.