

Bite Prevention

A TRAINER'S TIPS FOR BITE PREVENTION

Don't let *your* dog bite the hand that feeds him – or any other hand. The prevention of biting should start the day you let your dog and continue for all his life. Be sure you can handle the job before you take it on. Most mouthing or nipping in dogs is often experimental or happens because they are unaccustomed to handling or restraint. A dog that poses an immediate and serious threat must be managed carefully until you can get into a training program or start working with a trainer experience in modifying this type of behavior. Combative tactics, such as correcting, leash jerking or physical punishment or restraint will often provoke biting and may make it worse. Whether or not you work with a trainer, be prepared to protect yourself and don't hesitate to purchase a muzzle and use it if you think the dog is serious about biting. If you feel you cannot modify mouthing or snapping behavior yourself, hire a professional trainer to help you. Below are some rules to live by with any dog.

NIP MOUTH-ACTION IN THE BUD

Nipping and mouthing, even in fun, is the forerunner of biting if it is allowed to go unchecked. Puppies often mouth or chew on human hands and feet when they are teething. If allowed to do this, they may press increasingly harder until they are actually biting. Your dog must learn first to inhibit bites so they do not hurt, then to stop mouthing all together.

When he nips or mouths, try a firm sounding “Ouch”, and stop playing with him. If he persists, march him off to a “time out” area and leave him there to cool off for about a minute. Loss of social privileges causes most dogs to modify this behavior on their own. For persistent or very intense dogs, it's best to work with a professional to find some tactics that are effective.

BE SMART -- USE A LEASH

The leash is your training equipment and should be respected by your dog. Try not to let them chew it or tug it unless you have given permission to do so. If your dog grabs the leash, try offering him a treat or toy in exchange for it and then take the leash up short until none of it is dangling. Praise your dog a lot for having his mouth off the leash. Have the dog wear a leash or long line when he is loose so that you can get him out of trouble without having to make close contact and reward him for the correct behavior. Sometimes, just stopping everything until the dog settles down and then quietly praising will get the message across. (See “Time Out” area above).

NEWSPAPERS ARE FOR READING

Never, never hit your naughty dog with anything. An object swinging toward a dog is much more likely to increase aggressive tendencies than to prevent them. The person who invented the rolled newspaper as a discipline was a fool and millions of dogs have suffered because of it. Objects can also make a shy dog feel like snapping. Time outs and loss of social privileges, along with positive training to do appropriate behaviors are often all that is needed. Remember that changing the behavior takes time and effort.

TEACH YOUR DOG THE COMMAND “ENOUGH”

ENOUGH means: What you're doing is OK, but I want you to stop for now. Since most dogs learn by tone of voice, this is not too complicated. Use ENOUGH for wildness, excessive barking, or roughness. Say the word, then give them an appropriate behavior to do. Teaching the dog to discriminate between biting and energetic, but acceptable behavior is a good tool to prevent biting.

DON'T PLAY ROUGH.. PLAY ACTIVE

Play active – toss the ball for your dog to retrieve, jog, race, bike or swim with your dog. Teach him Frisbee, toss a stick or just get him to run in circles until he's worn out. Discourage your dog from tugging on clothing or any body part. Never let your dog bite or pull on his leash without your permission. Brief games of tug where you are in control and the dog has permission to tug are a good way to fulfill this need. Permission is the key. Ask children to

approach calmly and not wave their hands in his face. Supply children with treats and ask them to ask your dog to sit for the treat and for petting.

NEUTER OR SPAY YOUR DOG AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE

The reproductive hormones, particularly testosterone in males, create tension and stress. Unsterilized dogs are more distracted, unruly and harder to control than those altered at or before puberty. They are not more protective while intact. Instead, they are more self-protective, self-contained, and tend to use their energies more for reproductive activities (marking territory, etc.) than for working with you.

UNDERSTAND WHY DOGS PROTECT

A lot of people think their dog will protect them better if they never let anyone else touch the dog, if they roughhouse inappropriately and make the dog mean and aggressive, if they tease the dog and make him quick to arouse. This type of upbringing can create a nasty, biting dog or a withdrawn fearful one, not a protective dog. As a bonus, dog owners who use these tactics usually have no control over the dog's nastiness. Dogs protect their owners and families because they are pack animals, and it's natural for them to alert their pack to perceived danger. Some dogs have more natural protective instinct than others, but even the gentlest dog may try to protect an owner when it recognizes that the danger is real. A well-mannered, trained, friendly dog *may* protect you when you are in real trouble. But an unsocialized dog is likely to bite inappropriately, causing grief and damage in your *own* family.

Bite prevention makes sense for all dogs. So don't use excuses – "*he's too small*", "*she's too cute*", "*she'll outgrow it*", "*I want him to protect the kids*." You're only kidding yourself. And don't wait until you have to call in the Marines. Teach your dog limits from the first day, obedience train, and play interactively. Lack of appropriate socialization can be a death sentence for a dog. Given a reasonably controlled and socialized upbringing, any breed or mixed breed can be a solid, gentle and trustworthy canine citizen, a reliable pet, and a loving companion!



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