

Adelaide Veterinary
Behaviour Services

# Dealing With Normal Puppy Behaviour

## Mouthing And Rough Play

When your puppy comes home it will have spent most of its time playing with the other puppies in the litter, rather than learning how to play with humans. Puppies play with each other using their mouths, therefore puppies usually want to bite or "mouth" hands during play or when being petted. This behaviour is rarely aggressive and, therefore, not intended to cause harm. The goals of working with this normal puppy behaviour are to redirect your puppy's desire to put something in her mouth, such as an acceptable chew toy, and to teach her that putting her teeth on skin is **never** acceptable. You need to educate your puppy to understand that stroking and petting are not invitations to play. **Remember your puppy doesn't know the rules initially – you have to teach your puppy the rules, using patience and consistency.**

## Encourage Acceptable Behaviour

Redirect your puppy's chewing toward acceptable objects by offering her a small rawhide chew or other type of chew toy whenever you pet her. This technique can be especially effective when children want to pet her. As you or the child reach out to scratch her with one hand, offer the chew bone with the other. This will not only help your puppy learn that people and petting are wonderful, but will also keep her mouth busy while she's being petted. Alternate which hand does the petting and which one has the chew bone. At first, you may need to pet or scratch your puppy for short periods of time since the longer she's petted, the more likely she is to get excited and start to nip.

## Discourage Unacceptable Behaviour

You must also teach your puppy that putting her teeth on skin is unacceptable and that nipping results in unpleasant consequences for her. **Teach your puppy that nipping "**turns off**" all** attention and social interaction with you. Immediately as you feel her teeth on your skin,

yelp **"OUCH" in a high-**pitched voice (once only otherwise it will turn into a game), then ignore her for a few minutes. (In order to ignore her, you need to not talk or look at her, which may even mean you need to leave the room). Then**,** try the chew toy and petting method again. It may take many repetitions for your puppy to understand what's expected, so always be **PATIENT and CONSISTENT.** If this method does not work or you find your puppy gets more aroused then please ask us for some different techniques.

## Jumping Up

When your puppy jumps up on you, she wants attention. When you push her away, yell at her, knee her in the chest or step on her hind toes, she's getting your attention! This becomes a rewarding behaviour and therefore the puppy will continue to jump because from your puppy's point of view, negative attention is better than no attention at all. Rather than tell your puppy off, you need to show her what you want her to do to greet you – that is to sit and be quiet. **Remember your puppy doesn't know the rules initially – you have to teach your puppy the rules, using patience and consistency.**

**So, when your puppy jumps up:**

- Fold your arms in front of you or put them in your pocket, DON'T look or speak to your puppy, and turn away.
  Continue to turn away from her until all four of her feet are on the ground, then **quietly** praise her and give her a treat. If she knows the "sit" command, give the command when all four feet are on the ground, then quietly praise her and give her a treat while she's in the sitting position.
- If she jumps up again when you begin to praise her, simply turn away and repeat the step above.
- Remember to keep your praise low key, because if you are excited then you may be actually encouraging her to jump on you.
- Try to have every person she meets follow these same steps – **CONSISTENCY is very important**.

When your puppy realizes that she gets the attention she craves when she stops jumping on you and sits, she'll stop jumping up. Remember, once you've taught her to come and sit quietly for attention, you must reward that behaviour. **Be careful not to ignore her when she comes and sits politely, waiting for your attention (attention can include a pat, verbal praise or food reward).**

## What Not To Do

Attempts to tap, slap or hit your puppy in the face for nipping or jumping up are guaranteed to backfire. Several things may happen, depending on your puppy's temperament and the severity of the correction:

- She could become "hand shy" and cringe or cower whenever a hand comes toward her face.
- She could become afraid of you and refuse to come to you or approach you at all.
- She could respond in a defensive manner and attempt to bite you to defend herself.
- She could interpret a mild slap as an invitation to play, causing her to become more excited and even more likely to nip.

## A Note About Children And Puppies

It's very difficult for children to practice the kind of behaviour modification outlined here. Children's first reaction to being nipped or mouthed by a puppy is to push the puppy away with their hands and arms, or to yell in a high-pitched voice. This will be interpreted by the puppy as play and will probably cause the puppy to nip and mouth even more. Because children are smaller than adults, and they often run around waving and flapping their arms, this also causes puppies to get excited and nip them.

**Dogs should never be left alone with children under 10 years old and adults should monitor closely all interactions between children and dogs.**

### What's not acceptable

'Typical' puppy mouthing is done in a non-aggressive manner. If your puppy is growling before, during or after mouthing your hand, then this could be more serious than 'normal' puppy mouthing. If you are worried at all about your puppy's behaviour, or if you are not quite sure what is 'normal', then please speak to one of us to discuss the problem further. Your puppy will not 'grow out' of bad habits, so it is best to get help sooner rather than later.

**Remember your puppy doesn't know the rules initially – you have to teach your puppy the rules, using PATIENCE and CONSISTENCY.**