

What Is Puppy Nipping?

As a dog owner, you know that having a puppy is one of life's most rewarding experiences. You also know that those first few weeks and months can be challenging as your pup adjusts to its new home. One common behavior you will likely encounter during this period is nipping—when puppies bite or “nip” at the skin, fingers, clothing, furniture, toys, and anything else they can sink their little teeth into. Here, we explain what puppy nipping is, how to recognize the signs of nipping, steps for dealing with it, and different positive reinforcement techniques that discourage this behavior. We also discuss when nipping can become harmful and the long-term benefits of training your dog to stop nipping. Finally, we provide tips on handling situations when puppy nipping occurs and list some fun activities you can do with your pup to help prevent nipping.

What Is Puppy Nipping?

Puppy nipping is when a puppy uses its teeth to bite, snap, or chew on people or other animals. It often starts as a playful activity but can become aggressive and potentially dangerous. Puppy nipping is a natural behavior and is often seen as part of playtime.

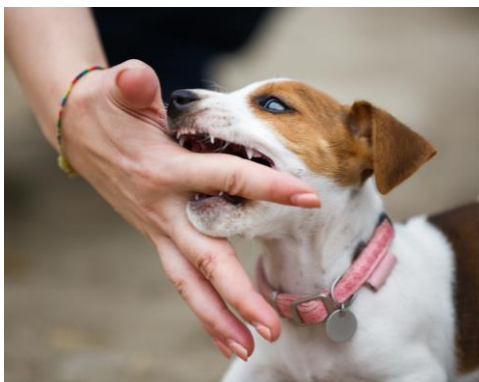
Nipping is a normal behavior in puppies, in both mixed and pure breeds, often stemming from how they interact with their littermates. Generally speaking, nipping allows young dogs to explore and play. Puppies bite for a variety of reasons, including teething, overexcitement, and boredom and as a way to

communicate. The most important thing to remember is that puppies don't understand their strength or how we perceive biting. Therefore, we must teach our puppies the appropriate ways to play and socialize with others.

When puppies are bored, they may look for ways to entertain themselves. This often involves mouthing and chewing on furniture, plants, or shoes. To help combat boredom, provide your pup with plenty of interactive toys that will keep them mentally and physically stimulated throughout the day.

If your puppy is overly excited during playtime, it may start to mouth and bite harder than normal. To help prevent this behavior, practice short play sessions with frequent breaks for rest. This lets your pup relax and calm down before the next fun round. Additionally, if the puppy continues to nip, all games should stop, and the puppy should be given a short time out.

At this stage, the puppy typically does not cause physical harm and explores its environment with its mouth.



Play biting is an essential developmental behavior. They nip and bite during play and obtain feedback from the recipient of the nip or bite that teaches the puppy what is called “bite inhibition.”

Bite inhibition is information to the puppy about bite pressure, so they can self-regulate and adjust the force of their bite. When they begin to learn bite inhibition, they can then adjust their own intensity of their bite.

It is imperative that puppies learn bite inhibition: if they don't and grow into adulthood, they could unknowingly hurt someone.

Finally, puppies may bite as a way to communicate with us. This is often seen when they don't want to do something or feel threatened

by someone. To minimize these types of bites, paying attention to your pup's body language is important so you can better understand what they're trying to tell you.



Common Causes of Puppy Nipping

Understanding the common causes of puppy nipping can help pet owners address the issue more effectively. Let's take a closer look.

1. Teething

As puppies grow, they start to lose their baby teeth and replace them with permanent adult teeth. This process can be uncomfortable, causing the puppy to bite or chew on anything around them to relieve the discomfort. Appropriate chew toys for puppies during this stage can help redirect the nipping and soothe their gums.



2. Playing

When puppies play, it is not uncommon for them to nip to assert fear or show excitement. It is essential to teach your puppy that this behavior is inappropriate and should be discouraged, as it can quickly become a habit. Teach your pup appropriate ways of playing with toys, such as fetching or tugging. Show them that nipping causes discomfort (e.g., yelping the way another puppy might yelp when they nip too hard).



3. Stress

Stress is another common cause of puppy nipping. If a puppy is feeling overwhelmed or anxious, it may nip to relieve the stress. To prevent this behavior, it's essential to ensure the puppy gets enough exercise and socialization, which will help the puppy to stay relaxed and happy.

4. Lack of Exercise

If puppies are not getting enough exercise, they may become restless and resort to nipping to burn off excess energy. Ensuring puppies get plenty of playtime and walks will help keep them active, which will reduce the likelihood of nipping.

5. Breeding

Some breeds are naturally more prone to nipping than others. Breeds like Beagles, Jack Russells, Sheepdogs and Border Collies may be more likely to nip due to their hunting or herding instincts. Owners of these breeds need to be extra-vigilant about teaching the puppy appropriate behavior.



6. Overstimulation

When your puppy begins to nip while being petted, it can indicate that he wants to initiate playtime or is overstimulated by the petting.

7. Lack of Bite Inhibition

If the puppy hasn't learned the pressure of their own bite power, it needs to be taught. Without learning bite inhibition, the puppy can bite harder than intended and cause injury.

What's the difference between puppy nipping and biting?

Puppy nipping is when a pup uses its mouth and teeth to nibble or grab on a person's skin, clothes, or objects. This behavior is usually caused by teething and playfulness and doesn't involve hard biting or breaking the skin. On the other hand, puppy biting involves grabbing an object with forceful intent, often breaking or puncturing the skin. This behavior is usually a sign of aggression and should be addressed immediately. To ensure your pup grows well-mannered, it is essential to start training as soon as possible so they learn acceptable behavior from an early age. You can help your dog learn to be gentle and friendly with patience and dedication.

What is adult dog nipping behavior?

Adult dog nipping behavior is when a dog bites or nibbles on people, objects, other animals, and even themselves. Nipping can express playfulness or aggression, depending on the context and the dog's body language. It can also be a sign of distress or an attempt to communicate. Understanding why a dog might be nipping is essential so you can properly address it and help your pet develop better behavior. Some common causes of nipping include fear or anxiety, frustration, boredom, or lack of training. If you believe your dog is exhibiting this type of behavior, speak with your veterinarian or an animal behaviorist.

How to Recognize Signs of Nipping in Puppies

Recognizing the signs of nipping in puppies can be challenging for first-time dog owners. Let's take a look.

1. Fearful Body Language

If your puppy is cowering, avoiding eye contact, and exhibiting fearful body language, such as tucking their tails and ears back, this could indicate the puppy is feeling anxious or scared. This behavior can lead to nipping, so addressing the underlying fear is essential; for example, we can show them how great x, y, z, behavior is by using food, toys, praise, or affection, to reinforce that behavior. See our body language infographic.



2. Mouthing

Mouthing behavior, which involves putting their mouths on people or objects as a form of exploration, is typical among puppies. It may feel uncomfortable when your puppy mouths you, but it's important to remember that this behavior is usually harmless. If mouthing persists into adulthood, however, it could indicate an underlying issue, and help should be sought from a professional dog trainer or behaviorist help.



3. Excessive Chewing

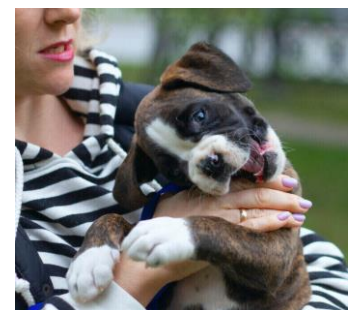
Excessive chewing can also indicate teething in puppies. It's important to remember that puppies are just like babies and are prone to chew on appropriate objects to relieve natural teething pain. Provide your puppy with plenty of approved toys (i.e., toys that are safe for dogs of all ages) and discourage chewing on furniture and other household items by using positive reinforcement training.

4. Aggression

If your puppy is displaying aggressive behaviors, such as snapping or growling, it's essential to talk to a certified trainer, qualified behaviorist, or veterinary behaviorist about how to address the issue. If left unchecked, aggression can result in serious injury to you and your puppy. A qualified trainer can help create an effective plan for managing nipping behaviors.

5. Refusal to be Handled

If your puppy is showing signs of being uncomfortable when you pick them up or pet them, this could indicate that they are displaying nipping behaviors. Again, talk to a trainer, behaviorist, or vet about how best to handle the issue and ensure your puppy feels safe and secure.



Consequences of Not Preventing Puppy Nipping

Not preventing puppy nipping can have severe consequences for your pup as well as for you and your family. Let's look at a few of these consequences.



1. Aggression

A term that is overused. However, we have to define what aggression actually looks like in terms of the body language of your dog, what is the dog achieving by becoming aggressive, and what the triggers that causes your dog to be aggressive. We sometimes see increased aggression if your pup is allowed to continue nipping. Over time, this behavior can become more ingrained and difficult to eliminate. It's essential to stop nipping before it becomes a habit, as it can lead to dangerous situations for you and your pup.

2. Injury

Nipping can also lead to injury for you and your pup, e.g., severe skin damage or broken bones in either party. Correcting the behavior immediately ensures that neither you nor your pup gets hurt.

3. Loss of Trust

If your pup is allowed to nip, it can also lead to a lack of trust. Your dog may become fearful or aggressive if not taught this behavior is unacceptable. This could lead to an unpleasant relationship and make it difficult for you to bond with your pup.

4. Loss of Socialization

If your pup is not properly socialized and taught to behave around other people and animals, they may become isolated and unable to interact with the outside world. This could lead to behavioral issues such as fear or aggression toward strangers, making it difficult for them to form close relationships.

5. Legal Trouble

Depending on the severity of a bite, you may be held liable for injuries caused by your puppy/dog.

When Is Puppy Nipping Harmful or Dangerous?

Puppy nipping can be harmful or dangerous in certain circumstances. If your puppy is nipping and growling simultaneously, it could be a sign that he's feeling threatened or scared.

Puppy nipping can also become dangerous when the pup nips too hard or draws blood. If your puppy bites too hard, it's essential to stop the behavior immediately and address it with a professional trainer who can offer guidance on how to teach your pup self-control and proper bite inhibition.



Finally, if your puppy is not responding to positive reinforcement training or a distraction technique, you might consider taking him to a certified trainer, qualified behaviorist, or veterinary behaviorist to address the behavior in a safe and nonthreatening manner.

How to Prevent Puppy Nipping

To prevent your puppy from nipping, it is essential to understand why puppies may exhibit this behavior and take steps to address the underlying cause.

It's important to remember that puppies are still learning to interact with humans and other animals, and nipping is a normal part of this process. When your puppy starts nipping, it's important not to respond with anger or physical punishment; instead, teach your puppy bite inhibition. See below for tips on how to teach bite inhibition.

It's also essential to remain consistent with your responses. Whenever the puppy exhibits the behavior, say "squeal," "ouch," or a firm "no." If your puppy backs away after these responses, praise them for doing so. It's important not to pull your hand away. This is teaching bite inhibition.



One way to address puppy nipping is to alter the puppy's behavior. Instead of scolding the puppy, teach it an alternate activity that can provide similar excitement. For example, prior to the puppy getting overstimulated, have a safe toy or chew item instead and using your hands to play. Providing something else for them to focus on makes the puppy less likely to bite humans.

Alternatively, prevent puppy nipping by providing positive reinforcement when your pup behaves appropriately. Whenever your puppy follows commands, offer treats or praise as a reward for good behavior. This will help set the expectation that following instructions is rewarded; it can also help stop the nipping before it starts by giving your dog something else to focus on.

You can also prevent puppy nipping by provide toys and chew items. Chewing is a natural behavior for puppies, so giving them a safe outlet for this activity is essential. Soft rubber toys and edible chews can help satisfy your pup's need to chew while keeping the nipping at bay.

Socialization is also essential for preventing puppy nipping. Taking your pup to meet other dogs and people in a safe, supervised environment can help teach them how to interact appropriately with others and reduce the likelihood of nipping. Prior to any socialization, make sure your puppy is up to date on his vaccinations.

Keep in mind that exercising patience and consistency can help your pup learn how to interact appropriately with people and other animals.

Another method to prevent puppy biting is to give them plenty of daily exercise. Allowing your pup to run and play for a few minutes daily can help them burn off their excess energy that would otherwise go into destructive activities.

Finally, if your puppy's nipping has become too aggressive, consider scheduling an appointment with a certified animal behaviorist, one who can provide additional strategies and tips to help address the problem safely and effectively.

In these cases, giving your pup a break is best by providing him with a toy or redirecting his attention to something else. Additionally, teaching your puppy the "leave it" command can help discourage nipping and other unwanted behaviors.



Benefits of Training Your Dog to Stop Nipping

Training your dog to stop nipping is essential to keeping your pup safe and creating a healthy relationship. Training can also offer several benefits.

1. Safer Environment

Training your pup to resist nipping can create a safer environment for yourself, your family, and other pets. It can help reduce the risk of injury that can be caused by nipping and biting as well as prevent damage to property.

2. Stronger Bond

Training your pup to resist nipping will create a stronger bond between you and your pup. As they learn to trust and respect you, your dog will look to you for guidance and be more willing to obey commands.

3. Easier Interactions

Training your pup to resist nipping can also make interacting with other animals and people more accessible. By teaching them the proper behaviors, your dog will be less likely to be aggressive in situations that may have previously caused them to become defensive.

4. Improved Health

Training them to resist nipping can help ensure they stay healthy and happy. This is especially beneficial if you bring your dog into public places or around other animals.

5. Increased Confidence

Training your pup to resist nipping can also increase their confidence. By teaching them how to behave and showing leadership, you can help build your pup's self-esteem, leading to an all-around happier dog.

Does puppy nipping hurt?

Yes. Puppy nipping can be painful, but the damage is usually superficial and typically does not cause lasting harm. That is why puppies need to learn bite inhibition early on. With guidance from their owners, puppies can understand how much pressure they should use when biting without causing severe injury. This helps them learn acceptable behaviors and prepares them for success later in life.

Do puppies naturally stop nipping?

Yes & No!

Yes... Puppies should naturally slow down and stop biting at around seven months when all of their adult teeth are in, and they've learned bite inhibition, to play with toys and appropriate chews.

No... While it's normal for puppies to be playful and rambunctious, you must start training and teaching your puppy early, so they learn proper bite inhibition. Be sure to provide plenty of interactive toys and other appropriate items for your puppy to chew on, and monitor them closely during playtime. If you don't train them, they won't learn what is appropriate and what is not.



How do I stop my puppy from jumping and biting my clothes?

When your puppy jumps and bites your clothes, stop moving to reduce their excitement and ask them for a different behavior you can reward. If they still don't listen, calmly place them in their crate with a small treat as a "puppy timeout." This time is not meant to be punitive—it's just nap time.

Time-outs should be short, so the puppy has the opportunity to learn the consequence of biting. Wait a few minutes until they calm down, let them out and see if they understood the lesson and they don't go

back to biting. If they don't immediately, put them back in the crate and repeat the process until they understand "teeth on equals timeout."

Steps for Dealing with Puppy Nipping When It Occurs

Once puppy nipping has occurred, several steps can be taken to help correct the behavior. Let's discuss.

1. Interrupt the Behavior: Teach Bite Inhibition

If your puppy is nipping, act quickly and firmly with a loud noise or squeal. By doing this, you will grab their attention and hopefully stop the nipping.

2. Offer Positive Reinforcement

After interrupting the behavior, it's essential to reward the desired behavior. Praise your puppy and offer them treats or toys when they are not nipping. This will help to reinforce the idea that calm, non-nipping behavior is more desirable.

3. Provide the Proper Training

Training sessions will teach them how to interact appropriately and give them skills to address their frustration or boredom. Socialization sessions will help your puppy better respond to new people and environments.

4. Seek Professional Help

If the nipping behavior continues despite your attempts to correct it, then it may be time to seek the help of a vet, animal behaviorist, or professional animal trainer—one who will provide additional advice and guidance on how properly address the issue.

Positive Reinforcement Techniques That Discourage Nipping

Positive reinforcement techniques can help to discourage nipping; they also involve rewarding desirable behavior while discouraging negative behavior. These techniques may include verbal praise, treats, or toys. Keep in mind that consistency and patience are key when utilizing these techniques.

1. Verbal Praise

Verbal praise is one of the most effective positive reinforcement techniques. Positive words such as "good" or "nice" can be used when the dog performs a desirable behavior. This reinforces that behavior and encourages the dog to repeat it in the future. It is essential to use consistent words and tones so that the dog can understand what is expected of them.

2. Treats

Treats are a great way to reward desirable behavior and discourage negative behavior. Every time the dog behaves correctly, a treat should be given to encourage them to continue that behavior. The treats should be small and low-calorie to help avoid upsetting the dog's diet. Monitoring how many treats are given daily, as offering too many treats can fill up the dog, discouraging them from consuming their daily nutrition.

3. Toys

Toys are another great way to reward desirable behavior. A toy should be given whenever the dog performs an acceptable behavior. This encourages them to continue that same behavior and helps keep them entertained. Toys should be selected for the dog's size and be sturdy enough to withstand chewing or tugging. It is also essential to ensure that no small parts can be swallowed or choked on by the dog.

4. Exercise

Exercise is also an ideal way to discourage nipping. Whenever the dog becomes restless or shows signs of aggression, it should be taken outside for a walk or given toys that can help release excess energy. This helps keep them mentally and physically stimulated, improving overall behavior. Additionally, giving the dog enough exercise can help keep them calm and reduce the stress or anxiety that may lead to nipping.

5. Clicker Training

Clicker training is a great way to teach the dog acceptable behaviors. This kind of training uses a small clicker device that makes a distinctive sound when pressed. The sound should be followed by a treat every time the dog performs an acceptable behavior. This helps to reinforce the desired behavior and helps them to understand exactly what is expected of them. Clicker training also teaches the dog acceptable behaviors without using physical force or punishment.

Fun Activities to Keep Your Puppy Occupied, Helping to Avoid Nipping

You can do several fun activities when it comes to keeping your puppy occupied to avoid nipping. Let's look at a few in detail.

1. Play Fetch

Fetch is an excellent way to keep your puppy entertained and tire them out so they are less likely to nip. You can use a ball, Frisbee, or even a stick as the object your puppy needs to retrieve. Ensure they understand the concept of fetch by rewarding them with a treat or praise when they return the object to you.



2. Hide and Seek

This game is a great way to keep your puppy entertained while teaching them basic obedience skills, like coming when called. First, have your puppy sit and stay in one spot while you hide. Once hidden, call their name and reward them with treats or verbal praise when they find you.



3. Teach Basic Commands

Teaching your puppy basic commands such as "sit," "stay," and "come" can help keep them occupied and give them something to focus on other than nipping. Start by teaching them one command at a time and always reward them with a treat or verbal praise when they get it right.

4. Teach a Puppy What No Means

Teaching a puppy "no" requires patience, consistency, and positive reinforcement, i.e., rewarding the dog when it responds correctly. Start using basic obedience commands such as "sit," "down," "come," "leave-it," and "drop-it." If he nips, Yelp and then say "no," if he backs up then reinforce with a "yes" and treat.

5. Puzzle Toys

Puzzle toys are a great way to keep your puppy mentally stimulated and occupied. These toys usually involve the pup having to work out how to retrieve treats from the inside or move pieces around to get them. This will keep your dog engaged for hours and help them focus on something other than nipping.



6. Outdoor Games

Playing outdoor games is a great way to keep your pup entertained while also getting exercise. Popular outdoor activities include fetch, tag, agility courses, and even swimming. This can help burn off some of their energy and make them less inclined to nip.

Conclusion

Puppy nipping is a natural behavior that can quickly become a problem if left unchecked, as it can lead to more severe aggression and unwanted behavior. Though it may be cute when puppies are first learning how to use their teeth or play bite, each puppy must be taught early on to learn the allowances of gentle playtime. Whether that means teaching them what is acceptable and what isn't in terms of biting or providing them with games, toys, and activities that will keep them occupied away from people, puppy owners must recognize the signs of nipping and establish ground rules so they can prevent it before it becomes an issue. Positive reinforcement techniques such as clicker training, treats, and verbal praise can also be used when dealing with puppy nipping. However, if puppy nipping becomes dangerous or overly aggressive, professional guidance should be sought for training techniques.

All in all, though, by recognizing the signs of nipping and taking the necessary steps for prevention and intervention, puppy owners can help determine their pup's success in avoiding this disruptive behavior. Please don't wait until it's too late; act now to prevent your pup from developing bad habits.