

Mouthing and Nipping by Marcia Albert

Puppies nibble. Sometimes they chew. Other times they chomp. When the pup has your finger in his mouth you could say that he is mouthing, that he is nipping or that he is biting. Is there a difference? Does it matter? Not to the person whose finger is being punctured by needle pointed teeth, but mouthing and nipping are different.

A pup who is mouthing uses less pressure. Generally, when he mouths he's looking for attention. As a tiny puppy in his litter he mouthed his mother to communicate his needs, so you may notice that he mouths when he needs a pat or to play, eat, drink, sleep or go out. When this happens you must ignore him or move away so he can't continue. Wait a few minutes and then attend to his needs. Waiting a bit will help to lessen his association between his behavior and your response.

Nipping is play behavior that pups use with each other, and it can hurt! In fact, your pup has already learned that nipping has quite an effect. When puppies play with their littermates or other puppies occasionally one will give a good yelp to let another know that he has bitten too hard. This feedback is the beginning of bite inhibition. If your pup nips you must take these steps.

- Stop playing, get up and leave.
- Yell "OWWWW" Sometimes this works beautifully, and other times it encourages more nipping. It may startle the pup and stop the behavior, but don't overuse it.
- Stop all roughhousing with your dog. Dogs love games of challenge and domination because they are good at them, but we must teach and play games of cooperation such as Fetch, Frisbee, Hide and Seek.
- If the pup nips softly, don't pull your hand away. Pulling your hand away escalates the behavior. Ignore or move away.
- If the pup isn't responding to any of the above then a time out may be in order. Calmly put the dog in the crate, and do it with no discussion and no harsh handling. After he has settled down and is quiet, let him out. Repeat if he mouths again.
- An alternative to using the crate for time out is to put the leash on him. Select a door in the room that leads to another room. Place the loop of the leash over door handle that faces the other room, and close the door. Now your dog is in the room with you, but can't go beyond the length of his leash. Again, do this calmly with no discussion and no harsh handling. After he has settled and is quiet, take him off the leash. Repeat if he mouths again.

Make certain that your dog is getting the correct amount of exercise. Too little exercise will contribute to behavioral issues. Too much exercise may over-stimulate him so that he has

difficulty settling down. Experiment until you find something to do that is enjoyable for both of you.