

# Puppies that Mouth and Bite

At HIGHlands Veterinary Hospital, we know that your greatest concern is "Am I doing everything possible to assure my Pet's best opportunity for Good health and long life?" At HIGHlands Veterinary Hospital, we have written policies, procedures and standards in place to ensure that the answer to this question is "Yes!" It's all part of Our Team Commitment To You.



## **HIGHlands Veterinary Hospital**

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This is one of the more common complaints by puppy owners. It is important to deal with the problem now because puppies that have been allowed to mouth and bite people are likely to become a serious liability as they become older. They can inflict damage, especially to children, and are more likely to bite in order to get their own way.

### WHY PUPS MOUTH AND BITE

Mouthing is a normal exploratory behaviour in ALL pups driven by an instinctive need to do so:

- to develop strong jaw muscles and teeth necessary for survival in the wild,
- to explore and to learn about their physical environment,
- to learn the power of their bite and how to control it.



Puppies investigate everything they can with their mouths just like human babies. A pup will direct its chewing to whatever is available including people. These activities are more likely to occur when the puppy is excited, particularly by movement; this means that the feet and hands of people are common targets. If immediately rewarded, with attention, then the pup is more likely to behave that way again.

Puppies are teething almost constantly from about 3 weeks to 5-6 months of age! When the puppy is teething, chewing on hard objects (e.g. rawhide bones) apparently will reduce discomfort and so reinforces the biting.

Human play activities often promote mouthing, e.g. if a child runs with the puppy this can lead to an instinctive chase and hunt response (part of hunting is biting your prey). Loose trousers, long flowing skirts, shoe laces and leads may all trigger off the chase-and-bite instinct.

### PREVENTION AND CURE

Having identified why the behaviour develops, the prevention strategies and solutions soon follow.

It is easiest to control the behaviour as soon as it starts by following a few basic rules:

- START AS YOU MEAN TO CONTINUE,
- BE CONSISTENT.
- PROVIDE CHEW TOYS such as rawhides, uncooked brisket bones, etc...,
- PUT shoes, Pot Plants, etc... OUT OF REACH,
- AVOID wearing loose flapping clothing or shoes while the pup is young,
- TEACH children to be passive around Puppies (aggression mostly leads to more aggression),
- Never tease or play roughly with a pup,
- Do not play tug of war as it encourages the attitude that biting is acceptable in play. Play is practice for real life.



### OTHER TIPS

Puppies quickly learn to control their bite when they are playing with their littermates. The highly pitched yelp of a sibling when play becomes too rough makes the 'biter' back off immediately. You should mimic this sound if your pup nips you.

Punishing your pup for biting will only increase the aggression of a bold puppy and make a fearful pup even more timid. Just think how you react to physical pain!