

Puppy Nips and Jumps on People

Keep puppy entertained with toys and games to prevent her from nipping and jumping on people.

By September Morn

Q: I have a beautiful, wonderful 4-month-old Boxer puppy named Sasha. She has mastered everything she is supposed to, but she nips everyone and jumps on people as they come in the house. How can I stop her from doing these things?

I've tried a can with rocks but that didn't work. She just barks louder and continues nipping at our hands and feet. We've also tried ignoring her, and that didn't work either. I'm at my wit's end on how to make Sasha more enjoyable for my family. We all love her very much, but it's hard for my daughters to enjoy a dog who bites them every chance she gets.

Kim

A: Four months is the age puppies start growing rapidly stronger and more athletic. Puppies this age are typically bursting with energy and act like everything is an athletic contest. Sasha is releasing some of her exuberance and joyful spirit by jumping and nipping when she's excited in play or in greeting. She may realize you disapprove of it, but may not be able to stop herself because that abundant energy needs someplace to go. You can resolve this by giving her something different to do with her energy and by teaching her more acceptable outlets for it.

For the nipping, avoid playing games that involve grabbing and biting. Playing that way with a pup may encourage hand-nipping. Teach Sasha to grab a toy when she's excited rather than a person, and play fetch-and-give games and controlled tug-and-release games instead. These are interactive games that Sasha can enjoy while keeping her mouth busy and off your clothes and hands.

Toy games like these can also be used when greeting people. When you or your daughters greet Sasha, have her sit, and then reward her by handing a favorite ball or fleece toy, or by throwing it for her to fetch. Wait to pet her until she's holding the toy. Reward Sasha by petting her and giving her the attention she's looking for. Although she may not remain sitting for long, having something to hold in her mouth will help take Sasha's focus away from her unwanted habit of jumping.

The more consistent you are, the sooner Sasha will learn the better behaviors you're teaching her. Keep a leash by each door, so whenever possible, you can manage Sasha when people are coming in and help her practice acceptable greetings. Keep toys available near doors for greetings and any other place nipping play is likely to occur. Be proactive. Grab a toy and redirect Sasha's attention to an acceptable game before she gets a chance to start nipping or jumping. Before long, you'll be able to send Sasha to get a toy herself rather than you having to find one to give her.