

Dog Nipping and Biting

Learn how to curb your dog's nipping and biting problem.

Brian Kilcommons

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Dog #1: Shih Tzu, female, 6 months What do I do to make my 6-month-old, female Shih Tzu not bite? We have tried a bunch of different things, like telling her "NO!" We tried pinching her nose, distracting her with toys, and smacking her on the rear, but nothing really seems to work.

Puppies go through heavy teething from 4 to 6 months old. Their adult teeth are forcing out their puppy teeth, which is uncomfortable. Mouthing is not unusual at this juncture.

As you've already discovered, pinching your pup's nose and smacking her on the rear are not only ineffective but can create other problems down the road. You should stop these actions. There is a difference between reacting versus directing behavior. You've been reacting; your new goal is to start directing her behavior.

Basic training commands are critical; they enable you to tell your dog what you want her to do and to earn praise and rewards. For example, when she mouths, tell her "Down" and reward her response with praise, a toy or food.

The most common mistakes people make that increase mouthing are rough play, fast movement and emotional reaction to the behavior. Your goal here is to teach your dog that her mouth is not allowed on human flesh. It's vital that you hold still as she mouths since pulling away and reacting will make this an interesting game for most pups.

Some suggestions: As you hold your pup and she mouths, strongly say, "OW!" Your intonation should reflect a combination of "Don't do that!" and affront. Remain still and verbally praise your pup once she has taken her mouth off your hand.

A squirt bottle of water also is effective with many pups. With a water bottle, however, make time to set up the situation where you are ready to correct the mouthing.

To reinforce the behavior directing, locate a group obedience-training class to continue your pup's instruction and be consistent in both words and actions. It's a valuable investment to ensure a happy relationship between you and your dog.