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## Mouthing

Mouthing or biting is normal puppy behaviour, but is sometimes inappropriate and undesired. From birth to around six weeks of age when you got your puppy, the litter mates play and mouth each other. When one puppy bites a litter mate too hard play stops and the puppy learns through no interaction and body language that biting is not rewarded.

The golden rule for behaviour training is; if you reward a behaviour that behaviour will increase, if you ignore a behaviour that behaviour will diminish. So, if you have a mouthy puppy you need to stop interaction to diminish this behaviour, and ask the puppy for a different more appropriate behaviour that you can reward. E.g. sit.

To teach your puppy that mouthing is not accepted, when your puppy mouths you; stop interaction immediately. Take your hands away and turn your back ignoring your puppy. Do not yell, as this is giving your puppy attention, 'rewarding' the bad behaviour and could inadvertently frighten your puppy. Often when puppies bite children, the child will scream and wave their hands around to get the puppy off. This behaviour makes the puppy excited and thinks biting is an exciting game. If a child is being mouthed by the puppy it is important for the child to remain calm, stop still, ignore the puppy and cross their arms in front of their chest out of the way, be very quite with no squealing or vocal reaction.

When your puppy stops mouthing behaviour, it is essential to reward 'good' behaviour so to increase its occurrence.

\_ Use a calm voice as to not excite the puppy again, ask him/her to sit and reward with saying 'good dog' and a treat.

\_ Make sure you, the rest of the family and even visitors are being consistent with the procedure of what to do each time the puppy attempts to mouth.

As mouthing is a normal behaviour it is important to provide an outlet when the puppy is in a chewing mood, such as when he/she is teething.

\_ Provide chew toys such as a Kong or allow a controlled game with a tug toy.

\_ To keep this game controlled; ask your puppy to sit for the toy to start the game and to end the game ask your puppy to 'give' the toy by substituting the tug toy with a treat and saying 'mine' as you take the toy away.

### Hints:

\_ Avoid rough play using your hands at all times

\_ Stop any tug games if your puppy becomes over excited