



Mouthy/ Nipping

If you watch dogs play together, they often mouth each other. Many dogs play with people in the same way — by mouthing our hands or other body parts. Though mouthing is not biting, it can become too aggressive to be acceptable.

To discourage mouthing, always use a toy to play with your dog. If you inadvertently become the toy, say “Ouch!” in a loud, surprised tone and remove your hand from the dog’s mouth. Wait just one second, then offer your hand for licking. If the dog mouths your hand again, repeat the steps above.

If the mouthing or nipping continues, you may need to cut off all attention to your dog. This behavior is happening because your dog wants to play and wants attention. If you tuck your hands and turn away from him, you are taking away what he wants. You may also have to leave the room or crate your dog if he is persistent and give him some time to settle down.

For him to get the idea that mouthing is not acceptable, your dog will need lots of practice with the above techniques. Consistency is key, so try to make sure that anyone who plays with your dog knows how to discourage mouthing and nipping.

Unknowingly Reinforcing Bad Behavior

When dogs jump on us, mouth us, or nip at us, our first instinct is to fuss at them and push them off. What we are doing though, is unknowingly reinforcing the bad behavior. Your dog is doing these things for attention so whether it is positive or negative attention, it is still attention! The best thing to do is remove your attention completely, by looking away, turning away, and even leaving the room if necessary.

Exercise/Stimulation

Over-excited dogs that mouth and nip usually need more physical exercise and mental stimulation. When this is added more consistently to their daily routine, we see a drastic decrease in negative behaviors such as this. Make sure to spend at least 30 minutes every day exercising, playing, or training to stimulate his mind. (see Importance of Exercising Your Dog’s Body & Mind handout)