

BARK U Training Guide: Puppy Nipping



Understanding the Behavior

Puppies explore the world with their mouths, making nipping a natural part of their development. This behavior, while normal, is an important skill to address early so they learn how to use their mouths appropriately. To address nipping, it's helpful to understand why your puppy is doing it:

- **Teething:** Puppies have their first set of teeth, which they begin losing around four months of age. Like humans, teething can cause discomfort and sensitivity, making chewing and nipping soothing for them.
- **Seeking Attention and Interaction:** Puppies naturally nip when playing with other dogs. They may transfer this behavior to people as a way of getting attention or starting play.
- **Previous Reinforcement:** Your puppy may have learned that nipping gets your attention—even if it's negative, like scolding. For some dogs, any attention is reinforcing.

Setting Your Puppy Up for Success

Management is key to preventing nipping behavior from becoming a habit.

- **Provide Alternatives:** Keep a toy accessible in every room your puppy is in. If your puppy starts to nip, calmly redirect them to a toy instead.
- **Prevent Access:** Use baby gates or exercise pens to limit your puppy's interactions with people who may be more vulnerable to nipping, such as visiting children. These tools can also help when you cannot actively work on modifying the behavior.

Train an Alternative Behavior

Teaching your puppy appropriate behaviors early helps them develop skills they'll use throughout their life.



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- **Attention:** Train your puppy to sit or lie down calmly next to you as a default way to get attention. Reward them when they perform this behavior instead of nipping.
- **Teething Relief:** If your puppy is nipping due to teething discomfort, encourage them to chew on toys. Rotate their toys regularly and try keeping some in the fridge for extra relief.
- **Fill Their Emotional Cup:** Nipping can sometimes be a sign of boredom. Ensure your puppy gets plenty of mental and physical stimulation each day through training, enrichment activities, and exercise.
- **Learning to Self-Soothe:** Puppies, like small children, may get extra nippy when they're overtired. Provide breaks for your puppy to rest in their crate or a quiet confinement area. Teaching them to be calm and comfortable in their crate is an important skill to help with these moments.

The Key to Success

Consistency is essential in teaching your puppy how to interact with people.

- Always redirect nipping to a toy or another appropriate behavior.
- Reward calm, desirable behaviors like sitting or lying down.
- Be patient—your puppy is still learning how to interact with the world.

By teaching your puppy how to interact appropriately, you're setting them up for success as they grow into a well-mannered companion!

