



The Soggy Dog Blog: The Puppy Series: My Puppy Bites!

One of the most common complaints we get as breeders from new puppy owners is about the biting and nibbling their new pup seems to constantly engage in. Just to clarify: ALL puppies engage in this behavior. I would be suspicious -concerned even - if someone told me their new pup *never* nibbled fingers or chewed on woodwork. Healthy, active, curious puppies chew on *everything*, whether it's your toddler's unsocked toes, the legs of your antique coffee table, or the door latch inside your car. The first step to correcting this unwanted behavior is to settle down and recognize the normalcy of this behavior. No, you did not buy a "biter."

Now that you've relaxed and understand that you didn't buy the juvenile delinquent of the litter, you can proceed to understand the behavior itself and how to make it stop - and I would imagine if you are reading this, you are *desperate* for it to stop. Dogs, much like human babies, love to explore the world and both largely do it with their mouths. While your baby daughter sucks her toes, your new pup will chew on his tail, or perhaps her pacifier. Or maybe even her other foot. They are both curious about the same things and they enjoy the textural experience that chewing gives them. Dogs love texture. From soft, tender human fingers, to chewy extension cords, to coarse, dry wood trim, they are going to want to try it all.

As we'll discuss in future blogposts, dogs communicate almost entirely in their head/neck region. This is valuable in understanding their behavior and then in knowing how to influence it. Dogs communicate with each other by cleaning each others' faces (love and respect), by curling a lip (warning), and by biting each others' muzzles, ears, and scruffs (dominance). To get your dogs endless nibbling under control, you need to think like a dog. Swatting him on the butt isn't going to mean much to an animal that doesn't associate dominance with his nether region.

When you catch your pup in the act of happily demolishing your favorite pair of Rocky Boots, grab him by the muzzle, pinch it shut, and in your best "angry" voice, tell him NO. NO, NO, NO. And give him a good staredown. Hold his muzzle shut for a second longer, and then release him. Reclaim your precious boots and immediately offer him an *appropriate* chew toy. If he engages in chewing the toy, gave him a pat on the head and tell him "Good Boy" in a praiseful, cheerful voice. If he proceeds to go back after your boots (or something else inappropriate), go back to step one. Grab muzzle

and repeat. I have clients tell me, "I tried that already and he did it again anyway." Guess what: You aren't pinching it shut hard enough. This likely sounds mean, but consider the alternative. Do you want your beautiful new pup to get hurt (or potentially kill) himself chewing on a cord or eating firewood? As you'll see as we progress through our blogposts on dog training, sometimes an ounce of stern discipline on the front end can improve your dog's life - or even save it - on the tail end (pun intended).

At Soggy Acres, we send our pups home with their new owners at seven weeks of age. This is a great age to not only enjoy all of their crazy puppy antics and to start bonding, but it's also plenty old enough to begin working on basic obedience. Curtailing unwanted chewing is entirely up to you, the owner, and the time to start working on it is now.