

THE WELL BEHAVED DOG

Play Biting

Puppies learn through play and they explore with their mouths. This behaviour starts at approximately three weeks of age and the puppies will play bite their litter-mates and their mum.

There is a lot of learning taking place here; this is one of the reasons puppies should stay with their litter until at least eight weeks old. Puppies that leave the litter early can be very mouthy because they will have missed out on important learning.

Puppies learn about the strength of their jaws through play and subsequently learn to inhibit their bite. In the litter, if a puppy bites too hard, the other puppy will yelp and then stop playing. Many books tell you to yelp and that this will stop the puppy from biting. If you have tried this you may have found that your puppy got more excited. This is because, unless you have a high-pitched voice, you will be unable to imitate the yelp of a puppy. The yelp only interrupts play biting behaviour. If the consequence of it is that nobody will play with you, this is what changes the behaviour and the puppy learns to inhibit its bite.

Play Biting or Genetic Behaviour?

Some breeds are genetically mouthy. Anything that is bred to retrieve, grab or hold will have a natural desire to have something in its mouth.

Working Shepherd types, such as the Belgian and German, will also have a desire to hold and if they get over excited in play this innate desire to hold will kick in. Gun-dogs will also want to hold when excited.

Herding breeds will have the same response when overexcited but their genetic behaviour is to nip as opposed to hold.

It is important to understand that this is different to play biting.



Five Top Tips for Play Biting

- 1) If your puppy bites hard, walk away and stop playing or remove your puppy for a short time out session.
- 2) Do not encourage play biting or rough and tumble play with your puppy.
- 3) If you are playing make sure you have a toy when you start and encourage the mouthing behaviour onto a toy straight away. If you don't have a toy your puppy only has your hands and clothes to grab hold of.
- 4) Play if your puppy plays nicely and don't play if they are biting or rough.
- 5) Make some house rules, such as no teeth on human skin, and always be consistent.

