



TRAINING TIPS

# Puppy Mouthing

& BITE INHIBITION

Puppies need to mouth! It teaches them “bite inhibition” (the ability to soften their mouths for a gentle grip). This will be very important when they become adults, and have more powerful jaws and bigger teeth! Much bite inhibition is learned within the litter before puppies leave their mother and siblings, but the lesson continues when they come to live with their human families.

Laurie Luck of [Smart Dog University](http://smartdoguniversity.com) (<http://smartdoguniversity.com>) has a beautifully straightforward protocol to teach puppies to soften their bite in a few weeks. Laurie trains dogs for Service Dogs of Virginia, and is an instructor for the Karen Pryor Academy, one of the pre-eminent schools for clicker trainers.

Basically Laurie breaks the bites into four levels:

1. gentle teeth on skin without any pressure
2. firm pressure
3. indented skin (you're surprised there isn't any blood!)
4. blood!

In her protocol you respond only to the strongest bites—level 4 in the first week—by simply saying “OW”, standing up, and leaving. For all other bites you redirect with an appropriate toy to chew. In week 2, as the level 4 bites diminish, you respond to level 3 bites the same way: simply saying “OW”, standing up, and leaving. In week 3, as level 3 and 4 bites diminish, you'd add level 2s to the protocol, and finally level 1 bites in the final week. It's important to redirect the bites for which you don't use the “OW” protocol to appropriate toys.

Visit Laurie Luck's [Smart Dog University](http://smartdoguniversity.com/puppy-biting-solved/) page “Puppy Biting Solved” (<http://smartdoguniversity.com/puppy-biting-solved/>) for her complete instructions.

## **Puppy Mouthing: Attention-Seeking**

Mouthing can also be an attention-seeking behavior. As we do with other problematic behaviors, click and treat your puppy for remaining quiet *before* she bites, and give her some attention for being good.

## **Puppy Mouthing: Tired Puppy**

You may know that your puppy will become mouthy at certain times of the day, or after certain activities. This is much like a child who is overtired and needs a nap, but who gets all wound up! Before your puppy has a chance to start mouthing, let her chill out in a crate or other happy quiet place, and give her a stuffed Kong or other engaging toy to help her relax.

*Note that if you yell at your puppy for mouthing, or punish her, the nipping is likely to get worse because of the additional stress and excitement. Also, even yelling and punishing are attention, which can reinforce an attention-seeking behavior.*

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