Is your puppy being mouthy?

A puppy that is being mouthy or nipping is actually normal behavior, but it can develop into a serious problem if allowed to continue to do it when it reaches adulthood. As an adult even though the mouthing may be normal play, the jaws are much stronger and could actually hurt someone. If a puppy isn’t taught at an early stage what is appropriate and what isn’t appropriate, then it will most likely continue during adulthood. Some herding breeds are prone to more nipping then others such as Australian shepherds, border collies, Corgi and shelties and may nip at a person’s ankles or feet mimicking the livestock herding that it was bred for. Since younger children can be more active, running around and playing they may be the ones getting nipped.

So how do you start to work on your puppy’s bite inhibition?

1. When you play with your puppy, go ahead and let him mouth your hands. Continue the play until he bites especially hard. When he does, immediately say OUCH in a high pitched voice and let your hand go limp. This should startle your puppy and cause him to stop mouthing you. Praise your puppy when he does stop mouthing you. Repeat this several times. If this doesn’t seem to do the trick then follow the next step.

2. Withdraw your attention immediately and walk out of the room. Wait for a couple of minutes and return and resume play. If the nipping behavior continues, keep repeating by removing yourself. The dog will start to figure out that this behavior is taking away his reward (attention from you) and hopefully stop being mouthy.

3. If your dog plays without doing any nipping, continue to play with him. It’s important to teach your puppy that gentle play will continue, but painful play stops.

4. Avoid any rough house playing. This will only encourage the dog to be mouthier.

1. Give your dog plenty of chew toys to redirect his nipping on something more appropriate.
2. Sometimes spraying your clothes and hands with something that doesn’t taste good, such as bitter apple will deter your puppy from mouthing you.
3. Educate young children to not scream and run from the puppy
4. DO NOT smack your dog on the nose for nipping or mouthy behavior. This could make matters worse.
5. If your puppy bares his teeth and seems tense, this may be a sign of a behavior issue that could become aggression. Consult with a certified positive trainer to help with these issues before it gets out of control.