

# PUPPY BITING AND CHEWING

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This is an excerpt from 'Puppy Guide'  
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The guide is designed to accompany  
the Kindred Paws Animal Training  
five week Puppy School program.

For more information, go to:  
[www.kindredpaws.com.au](http://www.kindredpaws.com.au)

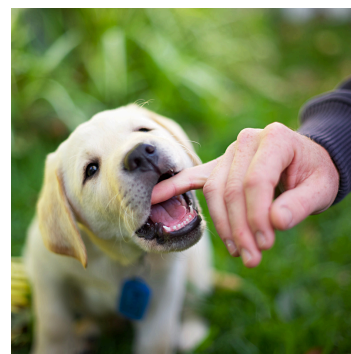


# PUPPY BITING AND CHEWING

Puppy biting is probably the most frustrating part of raising a dog. Puppies use their mouths for everything - and I mean everything! They will bite to communicate that they are tired, frustrated, playful, bored, scared, and excited. On top of this they are teething, and biting and chewing can relieve the pain in their mouth.

## So how do we stop those needle sharp teeth causing damage?

1. Set up your puppy's environment to help them make good choices (remove things they shouldn't chew and give them lots of options of things they can chew).
2. Manage your puppy's needs to reduce the chance of them experiencing the heightened emotions that lead to lots of biting.
3. Redirect biting to appropriate outlets.
4. Remove the reward for biting.
5. And lastly, teach alternative ways to communicate their needs (such as bringing you a toy to ask to play).



## Let's discuss each of these steps further to make them easy to understand:

- 1) *Set up your puppy's environment to help them make good choices (remove things they shouldn't chew and give them lots of options of things they can chew).*

Puppies are learning all the time, including when you are not in the room. When unsupervised, I strongly recommend reducing the space they have access to. This could be a puppy pen, a room, laundry, or secure yard. A crate is also an option if your puppy is already crate trained and we are not leaving them for longer than an hour or so. By reducing access to extra areas of the house, your puppy proofing job will be so much easier!



# PUPPY BITING AND CHEWING (CONTINUED)

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Next, remove anything your puppy isn't allowed to chew. This includes, kids toys, shoes, pillow, pot plants, rugs, wooden chairs, etc. In some cases you may need to move furniture around. If your puppy chews their bed, you may want to change this out for old towels or a blanket (no stuffing to rip out!).

Since chewing is a given for puppies, make sure we provide them with things they are allowed to chew. Find a variety of toys with different textures to provide your puppy. If your puppy is chewing something they are not allowed - think about what texture it is and find toys that mimic this. Once you have lots of toys, don't hide them away - scatter them around so there is always something nearby when your puppy has the urge to chew.

*2) Manage your puppy's needs to reduce the chance of them experiencing the heightened emotions that lead to lots of biting.*

Typically puppies will be more bitey when they are over-excited, frustrated, bored, or over-tired. Try to manage how intense and often your puppy feels these emotions by giving them a suitable routine that meets their needs. Take note of what times your puppy gets most bitey and consider why.

Maybe they are tired at 9am because they have been up playing for a few hours, so make sure they have a safe and quiet place to rest. Since puppies don't want to miss out on any fun, you will often need to encourage rest (refer back to 'Night Time Routine' for help on getting puppies to sleep). Puppies need lots of sleep - so making sure they get enough rest during the day will help reduce the over-tired tantrums.

Frustration and boredom are also common causes of biting. While you should make sure you spend quality time with your puppy playing and training, sometimes our human responsibilities get in the way. I suggest having some activities your puppy can do alone ready to go for the times you can't give your puppy attention. For example, I would use a puzzle toy with my puppy Suki when I fed her breakfast - this would give me time to get ready for the day during what is typically a peak energy time for puppies (mornings).

If you know your puppy finds watching the kids run and play very exciting - and all they want to do is join in and start biting - manage this by separating puppy and distracting them with another activity.



# PUPPY BITING AND CHEWING (CONTINUED)

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## 3) Redirect biting to appropriate outlets.

When puppy does bite or mouth you, try to redirect them to something they are allowed to bite. Typically this will be a toy but occasionally you might find a long lasting treat (like a lamb's ear) may work better. By redirecting them, and ideally quickly, they spend more time biting the things they should bite. This reinforces to them what is enjoyable to chew so when they have the urge in the future, they are more likely to seek out the objects we redirect them to.

## 4) Remove the reward for biting.

Your puppy may bite you in order to get a reaction from you - they want to play or get your attention. In order to teach them this isn't how to do that, we need to make sure they are not rewarded for this. This means we shouldn't look at, talk to, or touch puppy when they bite you (or ask in other rude ways like jumping or barking).

Pushing puppy away (I know sometimes its hard not to), telling them no or making noises, and staring at them, is all interaction. Many puppies will find this exciting and rewarding. While other puppies may find this reaction scary or unpredictable (also not good as we want puppy to trust us). Hence, the best course of action is to remove all interaction between you and puppy. If you look back at the 'Dog body language' section, you'll note this is similar to how dogs communicate. They will use avoidance to indicate that they want space and to stop interactions. Use this to your benefit and start turning away, or even removing yourself from the room if necessary - to make the point that biting does not result in more attention from humans.

## 5) Teach alternative ways to communicate their needs.

As your puppy learns and grows, you may find specific areas where they have more trouble with biting. While we need to put in place the other steps of this biting plan, you may also begin teaching your puppy exactly what they *should* be doing instead. By providing them another way to get the desired outcome, and using positive reinforcement to put value in using this behaviour, your puppy will make better decision on how to interact with humans.



# PUPPY BITING AND CHEWING (CONTINUED)

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For example, maybe your puppy loves to bite shoes when you walk down the hallway. You may try to redirect by using a long rope toy every time you walk by. However, you may also find teaching a 'leave it' cue, or perhaps a 'heel' cue, more useful as a long term solution. (See skills section on how to teach these behaviours).

If your puppy tends to bite you to communicate they want to play, try working on a 'get it' or 'bring' cue to teach puppy to bring you a toy to start play. This is one of my favourites as it keeps puppy's mouth busy (they can't bite you if they are already biting a toy), and you have a toy ready to play with right away. This can also be a good alternative behaviour if your puppy likes to nip when you come home.

Be realistic and creative when figuring out alternative behaviours. While we would all love a dog that doesn't jump, bark or bite when you get visitors and calmly greets - this may be unrealistic for many puppies as they get so excited when people arrive. Instead, focus on a clear instruction you teach puppy (such as mat training). Focus on teaching them the behaviour in an easy setting, before transferring it to situation you need it for.

## **A final note on biting/chewing:**

Keep referring back to this biting guide and double check you are checking off all the steps. There will still be times when your puppy's biting will feel uncontrollable and perhaps a little vindictive. Trust me, your puppy doesn't hate you! Make sure you give yourself time and space when you need it (raising a puppy is stressful!).

Puppy biting and chewing can continue on for many months, and may vary based on breed. Try to keep consistent, and remember that your dog won't be a puppy forever (you will get through it!). If you feel really stuck with puppy biting, please reach out for more individualised help. Sometimes there are other factors at play that result in an increase in biting, such as health concerns which you should discuss with your vet.

