



## Puppy Nipping and Rough Play

When you watch a litter of puppies you will see them mouthing, nipping, and wrestling in play. While nipping and rough play are normal puppy behaviors that help them to learn essential social skills, we do not want our puppies to think it is okay to play roughly with and nip at people. By showing your puppy how to play appropriately with toys and other dogs, you are setting her up to succeed so that as a larger adult, she will know what is acceptable behavior.

### Tools for handling puppy nipping and rough play

- **Crate** – A crate is a wonderful tool for housetraining and confining your puppy when unsupervised. It is also a useful tool for providing time outs when your puppy is over-tired or for when you want to do something without having to constantly watch your puppy. Quiet time in her crate (with toys and a stuffed kong) is the perfect solution for many situations, and provides a much needed break for puppies and humans alike.
- **Tether** – Actively supervising your puppy is essential to prevent accidents and inappropriate chewing. Using a harness and training tether to limit her to a smaller space can make supervision easier. This is especially helpful in a house with an open floor plan or a room with areas that are difficult to puppy proof. When tethered, be sure to provide your pup with a bed, water, toys, and a kong.
- **Exercise, exercise, exercise!** – A tired pup is a well-behaved pup. If your puppy is grabbing everything in sight or constantly nipping at your hands, take her for a run or play a long game of fetch. Inappropriate exercise, like chasing after the kids in their bunny slippers, should not be encouraged. Chase games could be okay for some dogs, but in general, this game often escalates to nipping or rough play that is not appropriate for kids of any age.
- **Toys** – There are several different types of dog toys including toys for chewing, snuggling, and for interactive play. Toys are usually more fun when a person joins in the game so show your puppy how to play with her toys and praise her whenever she chooses a toy on her own. Teach children and guests to offer a toy to your puppy as soon as they interact with her to discourage mouthing of hands and clothes. Use toys to redirect your puppy when she is trying to play in an unacceptable way. Trade a soft toy for an unacceptable item she has found to chew. Food toys are a must for alone time. Every time your pup is crated, or tethered, fill a food dispensing toy (such as a kong, kibble ball, or hollow bone) with her kibble, peanut butter, canned food or other delicious treats. Food toys will entertain your pup, exercise her jaws, and teach her what she should chew on all at the same time!

## **How to manage or interrupt mouthing, jumping up, and rough play**

The floor may be littered with puppy toys and yet your shoelaces still get all the attention! Because your puppy's senses are not yet fully developed, people and their movements will still capture her attention most of the time. Your pup may try to get you to engage in a game of wrestling by jumping on you, biting and pulling on clothes. This is how she has played with her siblings so it is up to you to teach her how to play with people.

- **Ignore jumping up** – Puppies jump up on people because they want attention, and often get it! You might be inadvertently rewarding your puppy when you push her away, or look at her and tell her to stop jumping up. Instead, fold your arms and turn away from your puppy. Praise and reward your pup when she is sitting (if she already knows how to sit) or when all four feet are on the ground. Keep your praise low-key so she does not get excited and jump up again.
- **Trade** - When your puppy is tackling your feet/legs/hands, the first step is to try to redirect her focus to a toy. Grab a nice fuzzy toy and shake it in front of her face. Squeaky toys and other noisy toys are great for getting your puppy's attention. Engage her in a tug game or a mini-fetch game as soon as she notices the toy. Reward her with attention whenever she chooses to play with a toy.
- **Plan Ahead** - If there are predictable times when your puppy is nippy or inappropriate, like when the kids come home from school, have them grab a toy before they say hello to the puppy or put the puppy in her crate until everyone settles down. Place a bin of toys by the front door, stairwell, and kitchen so that they are always handy when you need them. Always have several stuffed kongs available in the freezer to offer your puppy when you know you will be preoccupied with guests.
- **Quiet time** - Just like small children, puppies often simply need a nap! When your puppy seems overly nippy or distracted, try putting her in her crate with a long-lasting food toy for some quiet time.

**We Can Help!** The Training and Behavior Department at the Humane Society of Western Montana has a variety of resources available to help you and your pets live in harmony! The Humane Society has several dog trainers and a behaviorist on staff to provide affordable group and private training lessons and free behavior consultations.

- Contact Jean, our Behaviorist for a free pet behavior consultation by emailing [behavior@myhswm.org](mailto:behavior@myhswm.org) or calling the Behavior Helpline at (406) 549-9295.
- Contact Mariah, a Certified Professional Dog Trainer, to inquire about private lessons or a group training class. Email [outreach@myhswm.org](mailto:outreach@myhswm.org) or call (406) 549-HSWM.
- Check out our website at [www.myhswm.org](http://www.myhswm.org) for a complete listing of dog classes, rates and additional information.