OUCH!!! My Puppy Bites....

Many puppy owners complain of their pup 'mouthing ' (also called chewing, biting or nipping). THIS IS QUITE NORMAL PUPPY BEHAVIOUR. It is an important part of the pup's language on how to communicate and socialize with its peers. This mouthing behavior also exercises the jaws and assists with the teething process. Remember, puppies are always trying to get attention in whatever way they can. When playing with littermates your pup is getting its reward by starting a game through mouthing. You are now the pup's new peer so it is treating you as it did its littermates. If you have ever watched pups play, most of the interaction is chase and mouth (chew). We don't' have loose fur to protect our skin so we need to educate the pup that this is not desirable behavior for interacting with people.

Puppies and young dogs need to chew. We have another information sheet on 'Destructive Chewing' that we recommend you read in addition to this. What can be seen as cute in a new pup can lead to serious problems later in the pup's development if not rectified. As with most behavior problems there are many tools you can use. Different methods work on different dogs. Below are some suggestions.

REDIRECTING From the day your new pup arrives at home set the ground rules immediately. NO MOUTHING! Have a toy or two that the pup can play with that he enjoys. If the pup does start to mouth you, replace your hand with the toy that he likes. Start a game with the toy and praise the pup when he redirects his mouthing to it. If the pup ignores the toy and continues to mouth your skin, "squeal" as if the pup has really hurt you and then stop all playing by withdrawing yourself and leaving the pup alone with no attention. By ignoring the pup it will get the opposite of what it wants, therefore the behavior should lessen or cease.

BAD TASTE Another tool you can use is to smear a nasty tasting substance like Chili Sauce or Hot English   Mustard o your hands, then its done where your pup usually comes over and mouths you and allow him to get a taste. DO NOT STICK YOUR HAND IN THE PUPS MOUTH (or your own!) just allow him to do what he normally does and find our for himself that mouthing leaves a bad taste in his mouth. This method works on almost all dogs; the secret is to find something the dog does not like the taste of first before you begin training. 'Vicks' is another good option as it is not harmful to the dog but tastes disgusting.

SIN BIN As your pup wants you to react and play with him when he mouths, to stop him from doing it you must give him the opposite of what he is wanting. You do this by either commanding your pup to drop and make sure he remains there for a minute or two every time he mouths. If this does not bother him unduly, make the period of time he has to stay in the drop longer… every time (the penny will drop at some stage.) If he is not up to this stage of training yet, 'sin bin him' by removing him out of the area where you and other activities are. Leave him isolated in the 'sin bin' for around 10   minutes before allowing him to return. The dog will quickly learn that if he mouths you he will be sent to the 'sin bin'. If your pup throws a temper tantrum while in the 'sin bin' do not return until he settles down. This is also good training for teaching your pup that it will never get its own way by crying and carrying on.

If you catch your puppy with something valuable or delicate in its mouth DO NOT try to take the article from it as this will only encourage the pup to hang on tighter because he will think you want to play tug-o-war. The most effective procedure is to hold the pup up by the back of its collar (or scuff) with both front feet off the ground. Hold the puppy in this position until he drops the article voluntarily. Once the article has been dropped, replace it with a toy for the pup to play with. Praise the pup for taking the toy in place of the previous article it was chewing.

REMEMBER IF YOU DON'T WANT YOUR PUP TO LEARN SOMEHITNG, DON'T LET IT DO IT!