



K-9 Stray Rescue League

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K-9 Stray Rescue League would like to help you in any way we can with your new pet. To that end we've written some suggestions to help with many common behavior problems people deal with. Please know that while these suggestions may help you solve the problem, some issues may require more assistance than we can provide. In that case we recommend seeing a qualified animal behaviorist for a behavior consultation. If you need more assistance than this handout provides, please call us to review the problem and if it requires behavioral expertise we will refer you to a behaviorist in the area.

Chewing/Mouthing/Biting

Puppies chew. Acknowledging and preparing for this will make your relationship with your puppy much more pleasant than fighting it.

Before you even bring a puppy home there are things you can do to make sure your puppy won't destroy your house and belongings. For one thing, you should have a crate (please see the hand out on crate training). Also, you should have several appropriate chew toys. Different dogs like different toys so have a variety of textures and sizes on hand. Don't use old socks, shoes, etc. as toys because it isn't fair to expect your dog to know the difference between a sock that is ok to chew and one that is not ok. Pick up anything within your puppy's reach that you don't want chewed. Close closet doors and tuck garbage cans into cupboards or closets. Prevention goes a long way toward training your puppy not to chew inappropriate objects. If you can keep the habit from forming while the puppy is teething (on and off up to one year of age or more) then your dog will be very unlikely to chew inappropriate objects when presented with them later in life.

Understand the difference between mouthing and biting. Mouthing is more gentle and is often done to your hands or arms. Dogs use mouthing to communicate. Mouthing is not the same as biting, which can be a serious behavior problem. Dogs are very aware of how hard they bite and as they age they develop amazing control over their jaws. If your dog bites hard enough to cause pain beyond their first few months of life it's because they mean to. Out of control biting would best be handled by a professional, but we can at least discuss how to prevent the problem from forming in the first place.

Puppies learn to control their bite by playing with their litter mates. When they bite their sibling's ear too hard the sibling will yelp and possibly bite back. Very quickly the puppy learns to inhibit his bite so as not to cause yelping. When your puppy mouths or bites you too hard you should yell "Ouch!" so as to startle the pup. Don't hit him or retaliate in any way, just pull away and deny him your attention for a few moments. This will teach him to inhibit his bite.

If your puppy is destroying furniture or mouthing you in such a way that is isn't painful but is still a nuisance you want to take a different approach. Any time your puppy puts his mouth on something inappropriate, distract him from it by clapping or saying "ah-ah" to get him to stop, then immediately

offer him an appropriate toy. Try to get him to play with it, and if he does you must praise him heavily. Yelling "No!" at your dog might get him to stop chewing a table leg but he doesn't learn anything. He knows you're upset and he quits chewing, but he probably stops everything (including breathing) and leaves the room. He doesn't necessarily know which behavior upset you and he might just move to a different leg of the table! Make sure you not only tell him what not to do, but also make very clear what you want him to do.

A few other pointers:

- Grabbing your dog by the muzzle to make him stop chewing, barking, etc. may very well make him more focused on the mouth and can lead to a variety of related problems.
- If your dog starts tearing around the house and only stops long enough to nip at you or your clothes you will probably need to let him calm down in his crate. This is not to punish him, but merely to let him settle down. Once he's calm he can come back out.
- If your dog is destructive while you're not home or when he's confined you might be seeing signs of separations anxiety. In most cases this needs to be addressed by a professional.

Take care to teach your dog which objects he should engage with he mouth and which he should not. If you are consistent with him and provide plenty of opportunities to work his teeth and jaws in an appropriate way you can be fairly confident your dog will be a joy to have around the house for years to come.