DOG PLUS ME · THE FIX SERIES · NO. 03

The Puppy Biting Fix

The step-by-step plan for a soft mouth, calm evenings and the end of ankle attacks. For new puppies, older puppies and adult dogs who mouth.

Reward-based | The Bite Finder | 14 real-life situations | 10 printables



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START HERE · 2 MINUTES

You don't need to read this whole guide tonight.

You need the parts that match your puppy. Find yourself below and follow that path. Everything else is there when you need it.

IF THIS IS YOU…	READ THIS, IN THIS ORDER
The evening frenzy is happening tonight	The evening setup in Ch. 1. That's enough for tonight. Tomorrow, the Bite Finder (Ch. 2), then Situation 1 and the nap plan in Ch. 4.
Ankles, feet, sleeves and clothes	The Toy Swap (Ch. 5) → the Calm Exit (Ch. 6). Then Situation 2 for ankles and pant legs, or Situation 3 for sleeves, hair and clothes.
Kids in the house	Ch. 8 first → Situation 6 → put the Family Rules (Printable 7) on the fridge. Never leave a child and a dog alone together, any size of dog.
Hard bites or warning signs	Part 4, "When to get help", before anything else. Then Situation 8. Any bite that breaks skin needs medical assessment.
Older puppy (6 months+) or adult dog	The Bite Finder (Ch. 2) → Situation 13 for older puppies, or Situation 14 for adult and rescue dogs → the Soft Mouth Ladder (Ch. 7).
"Nothing works"	Run the Bite Finder (Ch. 2) again: the fix may not match the cause. Check sleep and play (Ch. 4). Then Part 3, "Find your puppy. Fix that." No improvement by about 6 months? Part 4, "When to get help".

How this guide is different

- **It finds the why first.** Tired, Wired, Teething, Bored or Learned. Each one needs a different fix, and the Bite Finder (Ch. 2) tells you which.
- **It gives you rules, not vibes.** Exactly what to do the second teeth touch skin, how long a break lasts, and when to ask for a softer mouth.
- **It has a plan B.** For the puppy who ignores the toy, turns your exit into a game, or bites harder when you yelp.
- **It's kind.** No shouting, no nose taps, no holding the mouth shut, no squirt bottles, no bitter spray on your hands, no pinning. A scared puppy can't learn, and punishment can make biting worse.

WHERE THIS COMES FROM

Every recommendation is based on published guidance from veterinary schools and hospitals, welfare charities and peer-reviewed research, in plain steps. Where sources disagree, we take the safer, welfare-first position. Sources are listed at the back. This guide is educational and doesn't replace your vet.

HONEST EXPECTATIONS

What's normal: honest timelines

You'll see guides promising "no more biting in 7 days". We won't. No reliable source gives an end date for puppy biting, so we don't invent one. Here's what the sources do say, so you can measure progress against reality instead of a sales pitch.

AGE	WHAT'S HAPPENING	WHAT'S NORMAL
Up to about 3 months	28 baby teeth, in by about 6 weeks. Puppies shouldn't leave the litter before 7–8 weeks	Lots of mouthing. It's play and exploring. Cute at 7 weeks, but already worth teaching
About 3–4 months	Baby teeth start falling out at about 12 weeks. Adult front teeth come in from about 3.5–4 months	Mouthing can feel like a real problem now. Teething starts, and it shows up as chewing objects
About 4–6 months	Teething in full swing	Many puppies get much less mouthy around now. Chewing stays high
About 6–7 months	42 adult teeth. Most puppies have them all by 6–7 months	Mouthing usually eases a lot. No improvement by about 6 months? Get help (Part 4)
About 6–18 months	Adolescence	Chewing (not biting) can stay high until about 18 months. Playful habits can get harder to manage

Dates are approximate and vary by breed and dog. Swallowed baby teeth and small spots of blood on toys are normal. A baby tooth still there next to its adult tooth means a vet visit.

OUR HONEST ANSWER TO "WHEN WILL IT STOP?"

Most puppies mouth much less once their adult teeth are in, at around 6–7 months. Some breeds and individuals take longer. Retrievers are known for being mouthy, and herding breeds like Biscuit, our Aussie, may need some management for life. If there's no improvement by about 6 months, get help.

Our standard: "bite-safe"

"Bite-safe" is our own standard, not a vet or charity one. Your puppy is bite-safe when, **for 7 days in a row:**

- [ ] there are no bites that hurt
- [ ] teeth on skin are rare
- [ ] the mouth comes off on cue or with a swap

Until then, your puppy is "in training", even if things look great. Bite-safe doesn't mean your puppy never mouths again. It means mouthing is soft, rare and easy to stop.

Three things that will happen (and are normal)

1. **Evenings are the hardest part of the day.** Many puppies get mouthier when they're over-tired. Plan for it (Ch. 1).
2. **A great few days, then a bad one.** It's not failure. It's data. Two painful bites in a day means you go back one rung on the Soft Mouth Ladder and climb again (our rule; Ch. 7).

3. **Sometimes the toy loses to your sleeve.** That's when the Calm Exit (Ch. 6) takes over. One fix doesn't have to work every time. The system does.

READ THIS IF YOU FEEL GUILTY

You're not raising a biter.

Maybe your arms are covered in scratches. Maybe you've cried, or snapped, or wondered if you made a mistake getting a puppy at all. Owners call it "soul-destroying", and the puppy blues are real.

You haven't failed, and your puppy isn't bad. Here's why.

Biting is how puppies play

Mouthing and nipping in young dogs is "generally a form of social play", say two board-certified veterinary behaviorists at VCA. Puppies explore the world with their mouths. With their littermates, a bite that's too hard gets a yelp and a pause in play. That's how they learn a soft mouth.

Most puppies leave the litter before that lesson is finished. So now you're the littermate. Your job is to teach "soft", one calm response at a time.

It isn't aggression, and it isn't dominance. Your puppy is not trying to be "the boss". The same vets say plainly that a biting puppy is not trying to dominate you. You don't need to win. You need to teach.

How to start again

1. **Drop anything that adds excitement or fear.** Loud yelps, pushing them off, shouting, nose taps. Many puppies read these as rough play, and bite more.
2. **Check sleep and play first.** Young puppies sleep a lot: many sources say 15–20 hours a day. A puppy short on sleep or play is a bitey puppy (Ch. 4).
3. **Find the why.** Run the Bite Finder (Ch. 2). The fix depends on the cause.
4. **Pick one response for the whole family.** The Calm Exit (Ch. 6), the same way, every time.

THIS IS NORMAL PLAY

- A loose, wiggly body with regular pauses
- Bites from gentle to moderate
- Worse when tired, excited or ignored

GET HELP IF

- A stiff or frozen body, or growling with stillness
- Guarding food, toys or beds
- Biting when touched somewhere, a sudden change, or a bite that breaks skin

If it's the right-hand column, that's not your failure either. It means your puppy needs a vet check first, then a qualified behavior professional. Ch. 2 shows you how to tell the difference, and Part 4, "When to get help", tells you exactly who to call. Any bite that breaks skin needs medical assessment.

THE ONE THING TO REMEMBER

It's OK to need a break. Put your puppy in the pen with a frozen chew and have a cup of tea. That's not giving up. It's a calm rest for both of you, and calm owners teach soft mouths. You're reading this page, so you're already doing better than you think.

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