

PUPPY MOUTH PROGRAM:

** Your pup will be drawn to use their mouth on you almost constantly, just like they did with their littermates. They are especially drawn to your hands.

** When their mouth makes contact with ANY part of your body or clothing, give a PAIN YELP. This is a sharp “pain” sound. It can be any sound you would make if you experienced sudden or unexpected pain. You can even say OUCH! The key is the sudden sound and the sharpness of the sound. It should sound like a “pain yelp”.

** You do this whether there is any real pain or not. This is done for any mouth contact whatsoever. Some owners will let their pup “gnaw” on their hand or finger. DON’T!!! You will only confuse them and you are basically reinforcing their natural dog behavior that you will not tolerate in a matter of a few days or weeks. This is unfair to the pup!

** When you give the “pain yelp”, this will have a startle/stop effect on the pup. They will stop, back up, and look at you with their eyes as big as half dollars. At this point, you have about one and a half seconds to DIVERT their mouths to something you do want their mouth on.

** Immediately following the pain yelp and their momentary startle/stop reaction, say “no mouth, good no mouth”, or any similar wording. The choice of words is not important. Your consistent use of them is. The words will mean nothing in the beginning. You are only putting words (sounds) to a behavior you “coaxed” via the pain yelp (startle/stop mechanism). Any command of this type should be with the command followed by the praise. For example you would say, “No mouth, good no mouth”.

** You will have to do this quickly as the startle/stop reaction is momentary. In the initial stages, they will startle/stop, but will almost immediately resume the behavior. They have made no concrete connections or associations that their mouth caused the “pain yelp”.

** YOU MUST DIVERT THEIR MOUTH TO AN APPROPRIATE TOY OR CHEW!

** Help your pup be successful! You are trying to pattern a behavior that is contradictory to an innately occurring dog behavior.

** You must be consistent and follow this process every time their mouth makes contact with you or your clothing.

** In the initial stage, DO NOT CORRECT THEM beyond the pain yelp. There are a couple of reasons for this. You do not want to scare your pup, make them fear you or feel threatened by you. When you have just brought them home and they have only been with you for a couple of days or weeks, you need to be helping them learn to trust you and look to you for guidance....NOT threats and fear. Fear and feeling threatened is not the first building block you would want to put forth in establishing a relationship with your new pup.

** Please keep in mind, your pup came to you directly from their Mom and littermates. This is all they know. Or, if they were in a pet store they have had little or no human interaction that would facilitate them having any sense of what you are trying to tell them. All they can do is relate to what they remember from when they were with their Mom and littermates.

** Another reason for not correcting your pup beyond the pain yelp in the initial stages is the pain yelp is the closest you can come to “dog speak” at this point. Until a pup/dog has learned your intonations, your attempts at dog speak will mean you are speaking “gobbledygook”. You could actually be saying something in “dog speak” that is different than you intend!

Note: I have many people tell me when they try to correct their pup either physically or with a loud NO, their pup “talks back to them”. This is another reason why many people will say they have an aggressive pup, out of control pup, stubborn pup, willful pup....the adjectives go on and on. What is the pup doing that is “perceived” by the owners as talking back, etc.? The pup is barking, sometimes mixed with a few growly sounds. The louder the person says NO, the more the pup barks. Does this sound familiar? I will ask the people if the pup is jumping around, putting their front paws on the ground and rump in the air, are they turning their head sideways periodically when they bark. The answer is almost always that this is exactly what they are doing.

In many instances, the pup thinks you are barking at them and “eliciting play” and they are answering back. Your loud voice sounds like another dog barking. Remember, they have not learned your voice, your intonations, and they aren’t very experienced at reading advanced verbal dog speak. This is part of what they learn from their pack as they mature. Another reason the pups can engage in this behavior is they have puppy “self protection” mechanisms. One of these mechanisms is to go into all out “puppy play mode”. This means all the things puppies do to “elicit play” from another dog. Think about it, if they can get this other dog into “play mode” then they are safe.

One other aspect to the barking is if what you have done or said scares them. Think about when your pup sees or hears something new and is frightened by it. Most times they will keep their distance and bark at the thing or sound that scared them. This could be a bug on the floor, a trash compactor, a vacuum cleaner, a loud air conditioner compressor... basically anything in their environment they are frightened of or unsure of. So, what they do is bark, growl, and dart forward and back at whatever they are afraid of or uncertain of. This may be exactly the behavior you see your pup exhibit when you correct them. You think you are correcting them, but all they know is they are frightened, threatened, or uncertain of what is occurring. Remember, at this stage, you do not have a communication pathway established between you and your pup. This is a prime example of you thinking you are saying one thing to your pup, but their “perception” is completely different.

** Knowing your pup is drawn to your hands, you have to keep your hands so they

cannot be engaged by the pup's mouth. This will mean having a chew toy or another toy ready at all times.

** When playing with your pup, you should always be playing WITH a toy. If you are not, you are playing with your hands or some part of your body and this is only reinforcing their focus on interacting with you. Pups interact with everything and anything in their environment with their mouths and paws.

** Even when playing with a toy, your pup will often go for your hand rather than the toy. Your hand is what they want for the reasons I have explained. You are more coordinated than your pup. Consequently, you should be able to help minimize the number of times your pup makes mouth contact with your hand. As pups, their mouth/eye coordination is not much better than an infant's hand/eye coordination. When infants reach to grab a person's finger or touch their face, they will more often than not end up with hair, earrings, tie, necklace, etc. People learn to ensure the infant does not grab these items by helping them to make contact with the right things. Additionally, infants are drawn to try and grab items that get their attention or intrigue them. If a person does not pay attention, an infant can grab an earring or hair or necklace. How often have you seen someone holding an infant and while they were talking to you and not paying attention, all of a sudden the infant has hold of their hair or their necklace or earring. Sometimes they grab skin on the neck or arm or face. What is more, once they get hold of these items, it is hard to pry their little hands off and sometimes it actually hurts! The correlation with pups should be clear.

** The pain yelp has to be used consistently and yet sparingly. What I mean is, the pups will want to use their mouths constantly, non stop, just as they do with their littermates. About the only time they are not using their mouth is if they are asleep. If you are NOT doing your part to engage their mouth on appropriate (by your terms) toys, their mouths will be on you and this will mean doing the pain yelp almost constantly for you to be consistent. Well, this creates a catch-22. You have to be consistent. But, if you are making this "sound, noise" constantly, the pups will become "desensitized" to the sound. Your pain yelp will no longer be communicating, rather it will just become "racket" in their environment and they will become used to it. It will cease to have the startle/stop effect. In any form of communication, when something used for "emphasis and impact" is OVERUSED it ceases to have any emphasis or impact.

** What about when you want to "pet or hold" your pup? They will use their mouth. Have a toy they can play with or chew on while you pet them. They do not understand the human form of petting and holding. In fact, they can get very distressed if restrained and cannot get away. There again, this is exactly what happens when someone tries to keep a toddler in their lap for more than 2 minutes.

Note: If you try to restrain a pup who wants to play, they will react very much like a young child does in a similar situation. For example, Aunt Susie comes to visit and she has not seen little three year old Johnny in over a year. She wants to hold him in her lap. Little Johnny is good with this for about two minutes. Then, he will start to squirm. Aunt

Susie holds on because she just wants to love on her little nephew. The longer he is forced to stay in the lap, the more agitated he becomes. He squirms more, starts to whine, begins kicking his legs and flailing his arms. He may even begin to cry or scream. At this point, little Johnny is not just distressed and agitated at being held still when every fiber of his body needed to be in motion. This is not a tantrum. At this point, little Johnny's emotions have escalated to irrational panic. Well, irrational to adults, not to him. Granted, Johnny knows in his mind that Aunt Susie is not going to hurt him and he is not truly in any danger. However, this is not what his emotions are telling him. His adrenaline is pumping and the instinctual fight or flight instinct kicks in.

I ask you to consider a similar scenario with puppies. The very same emotional responses will come into play. The difference is a puppy does not even have the human reasoning of three year old Johnny. In that moment of being restrained when the pup goes into panic mode, they have no concept of NOT being in danger. They have only their instincts. While little Johnny squirms, squirms more, kicks, flails, whines, cries, panics.....what can a pup do? All they can do is squirm and cry to get loose and if this doesn't work and they become panicked, they will do the only thing any dog can do. They will use their mouths. They do not consciously want to bite you, their owner. They are only wanting to get away from what feels to them as a situation that is life threatening. This may seem irrational to us, but is exactly what occurs with a pup. They are in pure survival mode...fight or flight. And, for a puppy, they know they cannot fight and survive. Their only possible survival mechanism is to somehow, some way get free of what is restraining them. Owners see much of this same reaction when a puppy "panics" on a leash. What you see pups do to the leash to get away is what they do when they are in your arms and they have to "get away, get free".

**** Understand that your pup is a "perpetual motion" machine. I have often said if the scientific community would study pups, they would have the answer to "perpetual motion". And, this perpetual motion includes their mouths. If you are in their proximity, the mouth will be on you UNLESS you are taking the measures to create a different, acceptable scenario.**

**** A happy and healthy puppy will be a non stop play machine. If you want to interact with them, be prepared to ensure you help their mouths make contact with what you deem to be appropriate toys.**

**** Help your pup to shift their focus from your hands to toys or chewies. When you offer the toy or chewy, they may be disinterested. Make them interested by putting the item "in motion". They will be drawn to it.**

**** Make sure they know these other items are just as wonderful as your hands. When you put them in motion and get the pup's attention to them, do not immediately cease the interaction. Continue to play and interact with your pup using this "appropriate" item. This not only keeps them interested in the item, you are teaching them how to play with this item. This will pay huge dividends later because they are ultimately learning they can play and have fun with these items. Eventually, they will realize they can do this without**

you being involved in their play process. This is the first step to a pup learning they can play and entertain themselves. Remember that pups are “all energy and motion”. They have to be involved with something. Before they came into your home, they had ready made playmates 24/7. You become their “replacement” playmate. It takes time for a pup to learn to be interested in things other than you and realize they can play and have fun on their own. You have to help them learn this. More importantly, you have to help them learn what items in their environment are great and wonderful playthings.

** Provide neat, interesting, and/or physically satisfying toys that they will eventually be able to interact with and not require you to be a part of the activity. For example, a ball is great because even when you are not involved in the play session they can learn to roll the ball, chase the ball as it rolls away, toss the ball and it bounces causing them to hop after the ball. Pups (and dogs) like a rope toy they can “shake and kill”. This can replace their need to do this the corner of a rug or a pillow. They can toss it, chase it, and kill it yet again. Toys that make noise are wonderful. When you introduce these toys make sure you are part of the process. Pups can actually be frightened by the noises. Once they have learned to be intrigued or interested in the noise, the pup will bite on the toy to cause the noise. They will dart at it and cause the noise and dart away. This is great fun. For chew toys, put them in motion initially. Get the pup interested in the chew toy. Once they are interested and realize they can chew on it, hold on to the toy. Let them chew on it with you holding the other end. The chewing will be comforting because of their teething and also because “chewing” is a naturally, self reinforcing behavior for the dogs. *Note: I will always have several nylabone or gumabone chew toys in the freezer. This is so I always have one that is very cold and comforting to the pup during the teething process. Again, this is much like what parents do when their infants are teething.*

** If your pup is playing with a toy and barks at it, this is part of their play mode. DO NOT correct them for barking at their toy. This would negate what you are trying to achieve by having them learn to play with appropriate items and to play by themselves on occasion. Now, if the toy gets stuck behind, under, or trapped in some manner, your pup will bark at the toy. You may need to go and “rescue” the toy, return it to your puppy’s field of play.

** Any person who interacts with your pup should be informed of your “no mouth” program. Tell them what you are teaching your pup so when your pup makes contact with any part of their body or clothing, they will do the same “pain yelp” and divert their behavior to an appropriate item. If you are trying to pattern one behavior in your pup and they are getting inconsistent signals because of other persons, the pup will be confused and will not be able to make the “connection/association” with what you are training/patterning. This is so crucial that I recommend you keep your eye on other people’s interaction with your pup and if they do not do what you need them to do; you make the pain sound when you see the mouth contact and you divert them to the appropriate item. Explain once again to the other person what is needed from them. If they are unable to comply with your behavior modification program, then you need to NOT allow them to interact with your pup. Keep in mind; this is the imprinting stage with your pup. Do not allow someone else to cloud the issue or to create “inconsistency”

in your program.

IF this is another family member who lives with the pup, explain to them that they are only making life more difficult for the pup and for the family as a whole. If this is a visitor, you can ask them to help with the process or you have to not allow the interaction. This is like a child who needs to learn to NOT do something. If another family member or visitor thinks they are being extra sweet by “allowing” the child to engage in some activity you are not allowing, they are only making life harder for the child and for you. This is every bit as common with the pups as it is with the children. And, it is you and your child or you and your pup who pay the price for the actions of these “well-intentioned” individuals.

** Be very patient and consistent in helping your pup to modify their naturally occurring mouthy behavior.

** Know that even when your pup is an adult dog, they will on occasion make mouth contact with you during play sessions. Know this was your mistake. You were not careful enough once your dog became overly “exuberant” in their play. You can use the “pain yelp” at any point in a dog’s life, if they learned it “properly” as a pup or at any juncture of their life.

** NEVER THUMP, HIT, OR STRIKE YOUR PUP/DOG, ESPECIALLY IN THE FACE/HEAD! This is one of the most threatening actions you can take. In dog speak, striking your pup/dog is one of the, if not THE most “aggressive” thing you can do. Remember, aggression breeds aggression. It is immaterial whether you use your hand or a rolled up newspaper or any other item. This is completely inappropriate with any dog and even more so for a pup. You may think you are saying one thing to them. But, what you are communicating to them in their language, in dog speak is very different from what you think you are communicating!

** Striking your dog can make them “hand shy”. In more extreme situations, your pup/dog could develop a “fear biting” reflex. There is no good purpose that can be served by this approach with your pup or dog.

** Spanking a dog on their rump does not work. When have you ever seen a mother dog or adult dog “spank” a pup? Spanking is a human concept and it does not correlate to any behavior for the pups or dogs. They cannot associate being HIT with a specific behavior. They only know they have been struck. If you correct a pup/dog in any physical manner, it has to in some way resemble how they are corrected by another dog. This is a prime example of something we humans do to communicate within our own species. Unfortunately, when used with the dogs it communicates something else entirely and rarely if ever connects with what you think it does. As I have said so many times, you “think” you are communicating one thing to the dogs when in fact you are communicating something quite different when seen through dog speak, dog communications.

** DO NOT HOLD THEIR SNOUT/MUZZLE SHUT! Some methods propose grabbing the snout/muzzle. What most people do not realize is this actually restricts or closes off the pup's/dog's breathing. They can react in the first seconds out of fear. However, within a short amount of time the fear will become sheer PANIC and TERROR! I can assure you the pup/dog is in no way associating what is happening to them with their mouth having made contact with you. They only know they cannot breathe or breathe properly. All you will have succeeded in doing is making your pup fear you or perceive you as a threat to their very life.

** Any form of "physical correction" used on a puppy will only cause a fear reaction. Depending on the form and force of the physical correction, the pup may move beyond puppy fear to the perception of a life threat or sheer panic for their life. A puppy has very few life experiences to draw on. They have not had enough life experience to learn how to handle themselves in different situations. All the pups have at their emotional disposal are the most basic of instincts. Even these instinctual reactions are in the earliest stages of development. They do not have a repertoire of life experience and thought processes to reason through the most advantageous way to handle or to survive certain situations. Think about a child "learning" to better handle certain situations, stimuli, and encounters in their environment. Moreover, the pup's instincts are geared for the dog/dog world which is dramatically different than the human/dog world.

** Your pup using their mouth on you and/or using growly sounds is no different than what they were doing with their littermates just a short time ago. They are interacting with you in the same way they had been interacting with their littermates. There is no intended maliciousness. There is no aggression. This is only a pup interacting, playing, and communicating in the ONLY way they know.

** It is up to you to communicate with them. HOW you communicate will determine their reaction to your communication. They do NOT know your language. They only know the language of their Mom and their littermates. It is up to you to realize they cannot learn whatever it is you are saying to them in a matter of a couple of days. You have to translate your "human" desires/rules in some form which allows the pups/dogs to become pattern trained to associate what you say and do in human speak to a specific behavior you are desiring from them.

** It will take much patience, understanding, consistency, and repetition for your pup to ever be able to connect what you are saying and doing to the actual behavior you are trying to develop, eliminate, or modify.

PUPS JUMPING UP AT YOUR HANDS

I have people who are very concerned about their pup jumping up and "biting" their hands. If you are not on their level or sitting down, the pups will still be drawn to your hands. In this situation, your hands are not readily accessible. Generally speaking, when you walk, your arms are at your side and the hands are just out of reach for the pups. They will want "those hands" just as much if not more when they are just out of reach.

The pups will do all they know to do, they will jump up to INTERACT with the hands. This is the same interaction and behavior they exhibit when you are holding a toy and they jump to grab the toy. Your hands are like toys to them. Your hands are very intriguing and important to them for all the reasons discussed. It makes perfect sense that they would jump up to grab, to make contact, to access your hands. Their razor sharp teeth can scratch or break the skin when they are on the same level as your hands, playing at ground level. When the hands are raised, they are jumping up trying to make the same contact and have the same interaction with your hands. The difference here is the hands are above their head which by a matter of sheer location means the pup has to jump up to reach the hands.

Think about what occurs in this scenario. Consider that what goes up must come down. So, just look at the physical action that is occurring at this precise moment. The pup is jumping up to grab your hands with their mouth. Grabbing means making contact which means the mouth will be open and then have to close. The pup jumps up, mouth open, tries to grab or make contact with the hand, mouth closes and body comes back to the ground. This can give the “appearance” of a pup trying to “bite”. This is not what is happening. They are only using their mouths as is natural for them and the physical action of reaching those hands above their head can cause more significant contact. There is nothing more to what happens than if you were on their level, except for what I described. There is no maliciousness or intent to “bite”, it is just a pup trying to play with and interact with your hands! This situation occurs most often when you are walking with your arms at your side. But, it can also occur when you are sitting in a chair and one of your hands is visible, but not readily accessible.

Knowing the draw your hands have for your pup, do not set this situation up to occur. Have your hands well out of reach or folded on your chest or in your pocket. Should they per chance make contact do the pain yelp and divert them to an appropriate toy. In fact, it would be good to have a toy with you when walking. Consider when you are walking, you are in motion. The pups want to follow you every where you go and they want those hands. So, if you really want to reinforce their attention to some other item besides your hands, have a toy with you that you dangle from your hand and help them make contact with the toy. Possibly toss the toy and help them get the toy and then toss it again. You will be using a naturally occurring event to reinforce teaching your pup to “play and interact” with other items.

When there are children involved, this can be more of an issue. The reason is the children’s hands are more readily accessible even when standing up and walking around. This means there are hands ON the pup’s level and they are IN MOTION. Talk about the best of all possible worlds for the pups! Knowing this is what will happen, teach children to walk with a toy or to walk with their hands in their pockets. Another child issue is when the pups jump at their hands; it will often frighten the children, especially when the pup makes contact with the hands. When the pup’s predictable behavior occurs, the child will move their hand quickly, often accompanied with a child screech. This “sound/noise” emitted from the child will further entice the interest of the pup. The pup will become even more enamored with getting to the hands or whatever has made this

intriguing sound. Often the high pitched noise emitted from a young child will sound much like a “critter” or really great toy. So, you have a snowballing situation. The child is getting rattled by the pup and their reactions are actually adding to the excitement and intrigue of the pup. *Note: This same thing can occur with adult dogs, which I discuss in the child/dog section.* One other situation which can result from this scenario is the child’s noises and actions can scare the pup and then you have a frightened pup who is feeling threatened. Add to this scenario a child who slaps out at or kicks out at the pup. The child thinks they need to protect themselves or that by doing this it will cause the pup to leave them alone. The reality is they are only further inciting or exciting the pup’s reactions. *Note: Sometimes a child will feel they need to hit, strike, or spank the pup or dog to discipline them because this is how the child is disciplined or how the child has seen the parents discipline the pup or dog. This should never be allowed! I cannot stress this enough. Never, never allow your child to strike a pup or dog.*

When there is a small child who does not know how to interact with a pup in this circumstance, you would need to make sure your pup is not out lose with this child. There is nothing positive which can come from allowing this type situation to occur. This circumstance can be very negative for the pup and the child can become fearful of the pup. Do not allow this type situation to occur for the sake of your pup and for the child.

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