

bite-proof your puppy



Teach your puppy now about things people (especially children) might do that dogs don't naturally accept: pulling her tail, taking her toys, or going near her food bowl or sleeping area.

Condition early

To prevent biting accidents later, condition your puppy to tolerate and even enjoy any kind of handling. Hug her, pull gently on her ears and tail, and tug gently on her fur. At the same time, feed her treats from your hand. Treats are essential. Just doing strange things to your puppy will not necessarily teach her to tolerate this from others. When your dog has been conditioned, and a toddler runs up and yanks on her tail, she is more likely to look at you as if to say "Where's my treat?" than to snap at the annoyance. Continue this conditioning at least monthly.

Sharing

Although dogs don't naturally share, you *can* teach your puppy to give up her toys, bones, food and resting place by associating the approach of people with good things.

When you first get your puppy, feed her at least some food by hand. If she shows any sign of unhappiness with you near her food bowl, feed all of her food by hand for the first two weeks. This teaches her that hands near her food is okay. As your puppy eats from her bowl, walk by and toss a treat near the bowl, so she leaves the bowl to get the treat. This



Quincy, a Pug/Beagle crossbreed

teaches her it's okay to move away from her bowl when a person approaches.


After a few meals, move to tossing treats into her bowl while she is eating, and then, to putting your hand into the bowl with the treat.

Do *not* take the bowl away and give it back – this teaches your puppy you are unreliable, and that she needs to protect her food or eat it really quickly.

If there is more than one dog in your home, these actions should be done in a private space (with no other dogs around) for a few weeks.

Exchanging things

Practice exchanging things with your puppy to interest her in an item she likes as much as the toy she's playing with. Give her your item and take away hers. Or, give her a treat in exchange for her toy. Then, give the toy back.

Ensure every experience your puppy has with people approaching her things or special places comes with a reward. She is less likely to become defensive later. 

Joan Orr is president of Doggone Safe, an organization dedicated to dog bite prevention (www.doggonesafe.com).