

## BE GENTLE WITH YOUR TEETH

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### Behavioral Vaccine #3

We all understand that puppies need to get vaccines for things such as parvo and rabies. But it is equally as important for puppies to get what is now being called “behavior vaccines.” These are the types of training and experiences that help your pup become comfortable in your world and they reduce the risk of fear and aggression later in life. Each week in class, we will talk about things you can do to “vaccinate” your puppy against problems later on. This week, the behavior vaccine topic is Be Gentle with Your Teeth.

### Why Is It Important?

Dogs use their teeth to communicate, play, and get what they want. Puppies need to be taught some important rules about using their teeth around people—ideally before they reach 5 months of age. If puppies don’t learn these rules when they’re small and manageable, they can inflict pain and possibly fear when they grow into adults.

### Why Being Gentle With His Teeth Doesn’t Come Naturally...

Puppies learn to play without hurting one another through interaction with their littermates and mom. If one puppy is too rough, the other puppy will often yelp and immediately stop playing. Since puppies normally want to continue playing, they learn to modify their behavior through repeated feedback from littermates and other dogs. However, puppies don’t get feedback they understand from people. Often we inadvertently teach them to chomp away by continuing to interact (pushing them away, yelling at them, etc.) with them even after they have bitten us too hard.

### Behavioral Vaccination Training

Since puppies don’t have a manual on how to use their teeth when interacting with people, they need to be taught 3 things:

1. **Be gentle with your teeth when you play with me.** When playing with your puppy, withdraw your hands, and your attention, when your puppy applies uncomfortable pressure with his teeth to any part of you. Wait 5 seconds and then re-engage with him. As long as he’s gentle, continue to play with him and give him your attention. If he bites you too hard 3 times in one play session, end the session and walk away. Be consistent. Once your puppy is 16 weeks, start to withdraw your hands and attention if your puppy’s teeth touch you at all during play.
2. **Take treats gently from my hand.** It’s critical that puppies learn to take things gently from our hands, especially treats since we use them so often in training. The first step is to teach your pup to hold still and wait for the treat to come to him. Aim the treat low and under your pup’s chin. The second step is to give him the treat only if he uses his mouth softly. If he’s gentle, he gets the treat. If not, the treat goes away.
3. **Be careful with your teeth if you’re frightened or upset.** Every dog, just like every person, has the potential to resort to aggression if scared or threatened. Sometimes dogs will simply lash out because they’re in pain. By practicing #1 and #2 regularly with your puppy, you increase the likelihood that he will practice self-control with his teeth when put in this type of situation.