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## Managing a Mouthy Dog

Dogs use their mouths to explore and play. While it's normal for them to use their mouths when playing with other dogs, it's not appropriate for them to do the same with people. Our job is to teach our dogs what behavior is appropriate when using their mouth is not an acceptable option.

There are many reasons a dog may put their mouth on you. These may include:

- During playtime
- When they are bored or frustrated
- When they are overwhelmed or threatened
- When they want to get your attention
- When they are excited

Two key tools to manage a mouthy dog are:

- 1) Avoid the triggers.
- 2) Provide appropriate outlets.

### Playtime Mouthiness

If your dog starts to use their mouth more with longer play sessions, keep playtime short and wind down before mouthing occurs. Frequent breaks for practicing calm behaviors can be beneficial for any dog. When playing tug, use a toy long enough for you both to hold it without the dog accidentally biting your fingers. If your dog tries to mouth you when you take a toy away, try trading them for something higher value like a yummy treat.

### Play-Bite Mouthiness

When puppies (age 6 - 16 weeks) mouth you during play, you can make a high-pitched yelp and then stop playing. This replicates how they learn bite inhibition while playing with their litter mates. After the quick break time, ask your dog for a simple behavior such as sit or look and redirect them to play with a toy. If they continue to mouth you instead, end the play and walk away. This works best if you can leave the room or step to the other side of a gate or pen where they cannot reach you. This teaches them that mouthing causes the play to end. After a short break you can reenter and start the play again. With adult dogs, mouthing should immediately end play. To set your dog up for success, it is important that everyone playing with them follows the same rules.

## Attention-Seeking Mouthiness

Teach your dog to “sit” when they want something. Soon, the sit behavior will replace the mouthing behavior – rather than mouthing you for attention, they will sit nicely in front of you. This should all happen simultaneously with ignoring the dog when they demand attention using their mouth. Anticipate when your dog may demand something, and cue or lure them into a sit instead.

## Boredom / Frustration Mouthiness

Provide your dog with more mental and physical stimulation and appropriate things to chew on, instead of your hand. You may need to offer different toys (stuffed toys, squeaky toys, bully sticks, KONGs, etc.) or activities (fetch, tug, a long walk, treat treasure hunt, etc.) to find what your dog will really enjoy.

## When To Seek Help

If your dog mouths you when handled, when picked up, or when they are in stressful situations, we recommend contacting a certified trainer or veterinary behaviorist for an assessment and training plan. Email us at [trainer@joybound.org](mailto:trainer@joybound.org) for more information!