

# The Thrill is Gone

THE THRILL IS GONE! by Marilyn Anderson

There is an undeniable excitement when bringing a new puppy into your home, and most people are pretty realistic about what to expect: housetraining, getting the puppy comfortable on a leash, chewing, and some biting problems (SOME?). Allowances are made for the teething stage, but a month or so after the honeymoon of puppy guardianship, many an owner is dismayed to realize that s/he has an adolescent dog for whom chewing on everything is all-consuming passion. Biting is often misunderstood, misinterpreted, or mishandled. Puppies do not "outgrow" any behavior-including biting. Because many people think they do, biting is one of the most common reasons for 'getting rid' of a dog. Those teeth really hurt! What's an owner to do??? First, know what not to do:

- .. Do not hit your dog anywhere on his body
- .. Do not smack your dog on the nose
- .. Do not "cuff" your dog under the chin
- .. Do not wrap your hand around your dog's muzzle
- .. Do not squeal and pull your hand away

You certainly do not want to cause a biting dog to get more excited, you don't want to hurt your dog, nor do you want to spend the rest of your life with little puncture wounds all over your hands and arms. Rather&hellip;

If your dog bites your hand, hold you hand as still as possible and sternly say "OWW!" (not "EEK!"). Upon hearing this, a dog's jaw will probably go slack just long enough for you to remove your hand, whereupon you will look at your hand and say "OWW! NO BITE!" The make a fist (no fingers to bite) and offer your fist to your dog. Most likely he will refuse to bite because of the "OWW!" he heard before. If he chooses not to put his teeth on you, very sweetly say "GOOD NO BITE." However, if he does bite again, repeat the "OWW! NO BITE!" procedure. Now give him another chance to make the right decision, but before offering your hand, generously daub it with a distasteful solution (lemon juice, vinegar, bitter apple). When he crinkles up his nose or backs off, refusing to bite, tell him, very sweetly and sincerely, "GOOD NO BITE."

If you have a biter or just a basically mouthy dog, have your distasteful solution ready and waiting. Teach you dog what behavior is acceptable, not just what is unacceptable. You may also offer him one of his own chew toys, as an alternative, if you like, and then praise him mightily when he takes it. Just remember, you will not always have a handy alternative, and ultimately what he needs to understand is that biting on people is never acceptable. For the ankle nipper or foot attacker, prepare a spritzer bottle of cold water (or a 1:10 mixture of either lemon juice to water or vinegar to water) to spray into your dog's face when he approaches in attack your foot mode. It isn't necessary to say anything. The element of surprise-the spritz coming out of nowhere-is the important factor.

Take care that you do not unwittingly entice your dogs into situations which can escalate into biting which you then cannot control. For example:

Scenario #1: Constantly petted, picked up, played with, touched, talked to, the dog is over stimulated and seems to crave more and more. When his demands are not met, he bites. He also squirms and bites when restrained in any way, and if he doesn't want a game to end he'll bite your hand to keep you engaged.

Scenario #2: You're on the floor roughhousing with you dog, getting him all revved up. It's all in fun, so you don't feel you need to worry about a few growls or accidental bites. After all, it was you who initiated the game, you are in control, you can stop it whenever you want.

Scenario #3: The dog has a jillion toys. He loves to bring one to you and then dare you to try taking it away. In his game, you chase him around the house, finally grab hold of him and struggle to remove the favored object from his mouth. It becomes a game of tug of war, which he really enjoys. He growls and hangs on for dear life. Winning is everything! You hang on for a while, but you have other things to do and he is tiring you out. You quite while he is ahead.

This is not to suggest that you should not pet, pick up, play with, touch, or talk to your dog. Just be aware that it is possible to overboard with too much attention and that, from a strictly canine perspective, the dog who is always being fawned over is being told that he is in charge, whatever he does is acceptable. The secret to good balance in your relationship with your dog is to choose the moments when you want to give him some attention: request some small token of respect (a simple Sit or Give Paw will do), and then give him the attention, the petting, ending with a warm "Good Dog, that's enough"-and mean it.

A dog who is encouraged to roughhouse can easily misinterpret someone else's actions as an initiation to play-bite. If you want to keep your dog out of trouble, don't roughhouse with him. The price for this kind of behavior is often very high.

Dogs may not have invented "keep away" or "tug-o-war", but they are the games most avid players, and are great for dogs to play with one another. In a competition, there is always a winner and a loser. Think about how often you have given in or even lost! If putting his teeth on you or on your clothing is a means to winning, that is what a dog will do; if growling works, that is what a dog will do. [With each "win", the dog moves up in the pack hierarchy. Don't forget that.]

Whether you are the beleaguered owner of a bitey puppy, adolescent, or adult dog, you have an assignment-teach your dog that it is fun and rewarding to play by your rules. You'll want to play with him more often when he plays nicely. He'll get lots of attention and praise. In the end, he'll feel very proud of himself, as will you. And rightly so!