

Surviving the "Land Shark" Phase: A Guide to Puppy Chewing & Nipping

For a puppy, the mouth is like a pair of hands. Much like human infants, puppies explore their world by tasting and biting everything they encounter. While this is a normal developmental stage, it can be frustrating (and painful!) for new guardians. Here is how to manage the "land shark" phase effectively.

1. Prevention: Manage the Environment

The easiest way to stop destructive chewing is to make it impossible for the puppy to get to things you don't want them to chew.

- **Puppy-Proof Your Home:** Keep shoes, kids' toys, and remote controls out of reach. If you don't want it chewed, don't leave it on the floor.
- **Constant Supervision:** Use baby gates, crates, or a "tether" (a 6-foot leash attached to your belt) to keep your puppy in sight. If they aren't supervised, they should be in a safe, puppy-proof confined area.
- **The "Trade-Up" Rule:** If you catch your puppy with something they shouldn't have, don't just grab it. **Interrupt them calmly**, offer a toy they can have, and praise them lavishly when they switch.

2. Redirection: Provide Appropriate Outlets

Puppies *need* to chew, especially when teething.

- **The Toy Rotation:** Puppies get bored easily. Put out only 3–4 toys at a time and rotate them every few days to keep them "novel" and exciting.
- **Food-Stuffed Toys:** Use toys stuffed with wet food or peanut butter. This focuses their chewing energy on something appropriate.
- **Teething Relief:** For sore gums, try freezing a wet washcloth or offering cold carrots. The cold numbs the gums and provides a satisfying crunch. (Remember to always supervise your puppy during chewing activities.)

3. Handling Puppy Nipping & Biting

When puppies play with their littermates, they learn "**bite inhibition**"—essentially, how to use their mouths gently. Our goal is to teach them that human skin is fragile and that biting ends the fun.

If the Biting is Hard or Painful:

1. **Redirect Immediately:** As soon as teeth touch skin, offer a toy. "You can't chew me, but you *can* chew this."
2. **"Be a Tree":** If the puppy is jumping and nipping, stop moving. Tuck your hands into your armpits and look away. Movement often encourages puppies to "hunt" your moving hands or feet.
3. **The Reverse Timeout:** If redirection doesn't work and the puppy continues to lunge at your skin, **you** should leave the room. Step behind a baby gate or door for 30–60 seconds. This teaches the puppy that "hard biting makes my favorite person disappear."
4. **Avoid Physical Punishment:** Never hit, tap the nose, or hold a puppy's mouth shut. This can make a puppy fearful of hands or cause them to bite harder out of defensiveness.

Check the "HALT" List:

If your puppy is suddenly "zooming" and biting uncontrollably, they are likely:

- Hungry
 - Agitated (Over-stimulated)
 - Lonely (Needs attention)
 - Tired (Puppies need 18–20 hours of sleep; an overtired puppy is a bitey puppy!)
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The Teething Survival Checklist

Keep these items on hand to soothe your puppy's sore gums and save your furniture:

- The "Chill" Factor: Cold numbs the gums. Have at least two toys in the freezer at all times so you can rotate them.
 - Texture Variety: Puppies crave different sensations. Ensure you have something rubbery (bouncy), crunchy (edible), and soft (fabric, but supervised).
 - Edible Chews: Bully sticks, collagen sticks, or dental chews. These provide a high-value outlet for the "urge to gnaw."
 - The "trade" stash: Keep a small bin of toys near the couch or your desk. When they go for your shoes, you have an immediate replacement ready to go.
 - Puppy-Safe Soothers: Aloe-free baby wipes or a clean washcloth, soaked in water (or low-sodium chicken broth) and frozen into a "C" shape.
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Safety First: The "Thumbnail Test"

When choosing a hard chew (like a bone or nylon toy), use the thumbnail test: If you press your thumbnail into the toy and it gives just a tiny bit, it's usually safe. If it's as hard as a rock (like a real marrow bone), it could potentially crack a puppy's fragile teeth.

Pro-Tip: If your puppy is obsessed with a specific "off-limits" item (like the corner of a rug), try a [Bitter Apple Spray](#) or a similar deterrent on that spot while simultaneously providing a toy with a similar texture nearby.

Professional Support

A reward-based puppy class is the best way to burn off energy while teaching your pup essential "dog-to-dog" manners. Learning to play with other puppies is the fastest way for them to learn that biting too hard results in the end of playtime.