

Teaching your new puppy the right way to play



Puppies can play rough. So to ensure a lifetime of safe and happy interactions, learn how to play appropriately with your new puppy from the start.

Most puppy play consists of chasing, pouncing, barking, growling, snapping, and biting. So how can you tell the difference between normal play and possible signs of true aggression in your new puppy?

NORMAL PLAY BEHAVIOR

In normal play, a puppy may play bow (lower its head and raise its hind end), present its front end or side to the owner, hold the front part of its body up, wag its tail, dart back and forth, emit high-pitched barks and growls, and spontaneously attack. Of course, even normal play can become too intense.

AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR

Behaviors that may indicate a problem include prolonged, deep-tone growling; a fixed gaze; a stiff posture; and aggression that is situational or stimulus-dependent (not spontaneous). These aggressive behaviors may be related to fear, possessiveness, conflict, or pain. Talk to your veterinarian if your puppy is exhibiting these behaviors.



7 steps to proper play

Follow these steps to prevent inappropriate play:

1) Provide plenty of exercise.

New puppies are bundles of energy, so give them productive ways to expend that energy such as going on walks or playing "Monkey in the middle" (see sidebar).

2) Provide mental stimulation.

Rubber toys that can be filled with treats, such as Kong (Kong company) or Busy Buddy puzzle toys (Premier), offer puppies a chance to chase and bite the toys and obtain a food reward.

3) Play with your pup.

Playing fetch or throwing a soccer ball for your pet to push around will sap some of your pup's energy.

4) Teach and review basic obedience commands.

A well-trained dog is more likely to follow orders when behaving inappropriately.

5) Conduct leadership exercises.

Follow three rules to maintain overall order:

- Nothing in life is free. Ask your puppy to respond to a command such as "sit" before it receives anything it wants or needs.
- Don't tell me what to do. It's OK to give your puppy the love and attention it needs, but if it

becomes too pushy about getting attention, such as by nudging, whining, barking, or leaning, pull your hands in, lean away, and look away. Walk away if your puppy is too difficult to ignore. Once the puppy stops soliciting attention for 10 seconds, ask it to sit and give it attention.

- Don't move without permission. Anytime you begin to move from one area of the home to another, ask your puppy to sit and stay for a second or two before you give it a release command to follow you.

6) Don't sit on the floor with your pup.

This tends to get puppies excited, puts family members in a vulnerable position, and makes it more difficult to control the puppy.

7) Promote socialization.

Puppies must have frequent, positive social experiences with all types of animals and people during the first three or four months of life to prevent asocial behavior, fear, and biting. And continued exposure to a variety of people and other animals as the puppy grows and develops is an essential part of maintaining good social skills.

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