



Puppy or Piranha?



One of the most common issues experienced by new puppy owners is excessive play biting of puppies.

Sometimes this can seem quite frightening as when accompanied by barking and growling it can concern owners that they have ownership of an aggressive dog.

Firstly, it is important to remember your puppy is young saying he is aggressive is like saying a two-year-old child who hit or kicked his friend at playtime is a violent person.

Whilst we must be clear puppies are not humans the analogy helps us to explain how to educate rather than to punish- would you hit a child for rough play or teach them the correct way to play?

We are the educators of our dogs it is our job to teach them to behave in a socially acceptable way, we are not dogs ourselves and we shouldn't try and mimic them, advise such as rolling dogs on their back is proven defunct, after all do we intend to spend our days weeing on our territory and sniffing peoples bottoms to greet them?

The main key points to remember are -

Cause Is the puppy overtired, Overstimulated or bored.

Environment - if you wanting your puppy to behave in a calm relaxed manner are you providing a calm and relaxed environment? rooms with a lot of noise, playing children, screaming and running around are not conducive to successful early training, and conditioning a behaviour you need to think of a way to overcome this that is appropriate to the make-up of your household.

Once your behaviour is established you would then be able to enforce it better in a more distracting environment.

Consistency everyone in the family must follow the same policy.

Patience Your puppy is a young animal it will take time and repetition to condition him with the correct behaviours losing your temper will not help.

Clarity Be concise use simple commands and adjust the tone of your voice accordingly.

Rewards Teach alternative behaviours that are preferable to you and the dog, don't negatively reward by shouting at a puppy this is actually giving them the attention they were after.

Getting a plan of action

First and foremost is prevention do not put your puppy or children in a situation where issues are going to arise so supervise play sessions and do not encourage wild screaming play from either party! Avoid over tired play times as a tired puppy is often more prone to mouthing.

Work on fun controlled play sessions based on learning and puzzle solving there's a wealth of information on brain games on the internet a good starting point would be www.nina-ottosson.com/ ensure your puppy has a time out area where he can go if he needs to rest and make that a no go area for younger family members.

Sleep and time out

Your puppy should have a private sleeping area that feels secure and comfortable this area should not be accessed by younger members of the family it should be the place the puppy can go to relax and sleep properly insuring your puppy has regular sleep breaks will ensure they are not overtired and stimulated.

Teaching the correct way to use the mouth

The Vizsla is a mouthy breed they use their mouths as a child would their hands it's how they explore their world.

Encourage carrying of soft toys and licking, even putting a little butter on the hands and calmly verbally rewarding the puppy using a simple command such as "nicely" for licking.

If contact from teeth is made simply remove your hand.

When play biting starts.

We are teaching the dog that the biting is not going to get him the reward he desires such as attention by play.

The moment biting starts use a command such "OUCH" if the puppy ceases to bite on the verbal command reward him, if he does not then remove your hands fold your arms and turn you back on him , if he tries to carry on jumping up nipping etc.. simply leave the room

You are teaching him that the negative behaviour spells the end of the fun.

You will need to repeat this often.

The importance of alternative behaviour.

I cannot emphasise enough that it is nearly impossible to teach a dog what not to do it is however possible to teach a dog what you wanted to do.

Young dogs are by nature often keen to please and keen for attention you need to utilise this to teach the correct behaviour spend plenty of time doing basic training sessions with your dog teaching simple commands such as sit and down so that these can be used as an alternative behaviour when inappropriate behaviour begins it is far easier to tell the dog what you require it to do them to keep preventing it doing the wrong thing.

Why don't we roll dogs on their backs or smack them.

Some dogs will simply see it as an extension of the game, no one of course should be hitting a dog hard enough to cause pain.

Fear of punishment can cause mistrust issues and effect recall, encourage resource guarding.

Dogs are intelligent enough to associate that type of fear with the person administering the punishment so what will happen is the dog will potentially stop mouthing the person that physically restrained them but will carry on doing so in other situations when the person is not present.

Ultimately you have not taught the dog the correct way to respond in a situation.