

# ANIMAL HOSPITAL OF LANESVILLE

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## Dogs That Bite

By Dr. Rene Wingerter

Dogs will bite for many reasons. Any dog will bite if he is in pain. Fearful dogs will bite any stranger who comes near them. Other dogs have been trained to bite.

I have seen dogs that owners have unknowingly trained to bite. The most common form of reinforcement I see is when a dog growls or snaps at someone and the owner, in an effort to calm the dog, pats it on the head and says, "Good dog, good dog." Although they may feel they are helping they are actually training their pet to behave this way. A dog should never be rewarded when he tries to bite for ANY reason. Instead you should say "No!" in a firm voice and not pet him until he is quiet.

You can also unintentionally train your dog to bite by letting him have his way every time he growls or snaps. For example, you try to get him off the couch and he growls, so you let him stay. That was a reward for growling or biting.

All puppies have a certain amount of instinct for chewing and biting. In fact they have to chew for their teeth to develop properly. However, you must teach them what they can chew on and what they can't. Have plenty of chew toys available. Keep shoes and children's toys in a closet or box. Whenever you catch them chewing on an inappropriate item, say "No", take it away, give them one of their own toys and say, "Good dog!".

Puppies can be taught not to chew on fingers, but it takes time and patience. It is very important for everyone in the family to participate in the training. Never play with the puppy by letting him chew on your hands. Instead, get a ball or soft toy and play "fetch" with him. Never play "tug of war" as this encourages him to hang on tighter. Instead always make him drop or release the toy. Sometimes pushing the toy into his mouth will cause him to drop or release it (make sure you have a firm hold on the item so it does not get lodged in his throat). When your puppy bites on your fingers, say "Ouch" loud enough to startle him and then immediately ignore him and walk away or put him in his crate.

Never start something with your dog that you know you can't win. In other words, if you can't get his nails trimmed without having to give up, take him to the veterinarian or groomer and let them do it.

Dogs that have bitten anyone should not be used for breeding and the owners should consult with a professional dog trainer for help.

If you have any questions please call the Animal Hospital of Lanesville at 952-3642. 