

## MOUTHINESS

Rescued dogs often come without much of a known history, with behaviors that are not appropriate and with a lack of training skills. Lucky for them we are here to help!

One of the more annoying behaviors (and I know we all have our pet peeves, get it? PET peeves? Sorry...) but mouthiness is high on many folks' lists. Mouthiness, meaning the dog grabs with its mouth: clothes, treats, and people, anything that is causing him stress or arousal.

Sometimes it is taught inadvertently by someone playing rough with a puppy, not realizing all the grabbiness they encourage eventually grows into a full mouth of adult dog teeth attaching itself inappropriately. This is one of the reasons a dog ends up in rescue.

Changing this behavior uses all the normal dog training elements: patience, consistency, rewarding the right behavior, etc. When the dog starts to get mouthy with your hands, stop moving them around him, drop them to your sides, or cross your arms. Then ask him to do something, for example, "Sit!" This will often reset the dog for a moment.

You can introduce a toy to redirect him. I find with many mouthy dogs, their reaction is due to stress from not knowing what to do, or not having enough to do. Picking up a toy gives them a task, a good direction for their arousal, and looks very cute to folks who have no idea what is happening.

The internet talks about being high pitched and squeaky when the dog puts his teeth on you: "Ouch, eek!" etc. I find with many dogs this reaction drives their arousal right through the roof, making the mouthiness worse.

You can also teach an appropriate game of tug, which helps burn off that excess energy/arousal/stress. Only play with one designated tug toy, we don't want everything in the house to become a tug item. Teach him to 'take it', then tug and be exciting, "Get it, get it, get it!" Let him win (as opposed to what the internet says), you can win too. He is not allowed to bite you to make you let go, game over. When you're done, stop playing and the game ends. Pick up the tug toy later so you can initiate the game. Tug does not cause aggression.

Try the redirection three times, if he is still grabbing at you he'll need a correction (your choice) and a time out, away from you. Notice what is causing the stress/arousal/anxiety and expose him to these circumstances in a calmer manner when possible.

Small children bring this behavior out in dogs due to their quick movements and high pitched voices. A dog with this kind of behavior needs constant supervision around children. The children also need to be taught how to react properly to the dog's behavior: standing still, crossing their arms, and turning away; most of this impossible for a child whose dog is putting his teeth on them.

The mouthiness will lessen with time and consistency, and both you and your dog will be happier.

Karen Oliver  
Bring Rover Over  
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