

Diminishing Returns

This is a game for those mouthing who just need to nip your skin, your hands, your arms and the back of your legs. This behavior starts in puppy hood as a method of getting the attention of adults, especially mama, for food and comfort. It is reinforced by us in many ways. Remember that attention is attention, good or bad. Eventually the reinforced behavior becomes exciting and you end up with a dog that nips, jumps, mouths and demands that you pay attention – NOW!

This behavior has two parts 1) the bite and 2) the arousal.

Before you start Step 1, play It's Yer Choice with increasingly more high value food until you've got a good response to steak.

Step 1 – Getting the bite

Have a bowl of small pieces of steak off to the side someplace safe. Place some food in one hand (a big chunk, not a tiny little piece of the steak) and a toy in the other. Hold out both hands. If the dog goes for the food, close your hand. This is an It's Yer Choice game, so no words, the dog has to make the choice of going after the hand with the food or the hand with the toy. If you played IYC enough, your dog should choose the toy, even if only to sniff it. If he chooses the food, just treat it like a regular IYC game waiting for him to go for the toy.

The rewards for going for the toy are the smaller pieces of steak in the bowl or, if your dog likes to tug, a short game of tug with the toy.

Your toy should be large enough to bite hard on, but not so large the dog's mouth will get tired of biting it. Eventually your dog will bite the toy and this is when you can move on to the next stage. Do not ever let go of the toy. We are looking for the dog to bite the toy, not take it away and self reinforce.

Step 2 – Handling arousal

Most of the nipping and jumping and mouthing that you are getting from your dog is due to 1) frustration at not having something to chase and grab and 2) all the excitement of being with you and not knowing how to handle that excited energy other than to bite.

Part A: The chase

Again, this is an It's Yer Choice type game. Your "steak" will be in a bowl on the ground at your feet. If your dog is too interested in that bowl, you need to go back to IYC and then redo Step 1.

The toy is in your hand. Put your dog in a sit and put your toy hand close to the dog's nose. Slowly move the toy away from your dog. She should have Step 1 down good enough that she should go for the toy. When she does, treat.

Repeat this at the same speed for at least 25 times before increasing the speed.

Eventually, not only will you be moving your toy hand fast but you will also be running away while your dog chases your hand to bite the toy. Remember, don't let that toy out of your hand. You can play a short game of tug when she catches the toy, but try hard not to let her run off with it.

Part B: Frustration

This game is almost identical to Part A. You will have your toy but you should not need the "steak" in a bowl. This time, once you have put your dog in a sit, grab her collar. Go back to moving slowly with the toy away from her nose. When your hand is as far as it

will go without you having to move your feet, let go of your dog's collar and let her run to the toy and bite, shake, tug.

Repeat this at least 25 times slowly building up the speed of the toy moving away from your dog.

When it comes time for you to start running, instead of grabbing the collar, you are going to "lightly" push on your dog's chest so that she backs up at least one step. Some dogs do not like being pushed. If that is the case with your dog, then have someone help you by holding her collar or a leash attached to her.

Troubleshooting:

If your dog is going for any part of your body and not the toy, take a step back and start with Step 1 again until your dog is understanding fully that she is to bite and hold the toy. Then build up your speed away from your dog more slowly so that she learns to handle the excitement of the chase.