

Taking Treats Gently

It can be so frustrating... you want to reinforce your puppy's good behavior with a little treat, yet the little bugger about rips your fingers open with those needle sharp puppy teeth of his! What to do?

Until you can teach him to take his treats gently, simply toss any that he earns on the floor for him to get. You can also spread peanut butter or soft cheese on a metal spoon and give him a lick of that for a treat (use metal rather than wooden so he is uncomfortable if he bites the spoon).

Now you need to teach him that snapping at your fingers no longer works to get him a treat! From now on he will need to accept that goody gently... or not get it at all.

1. Set aside the time to actually teach gentle treat-taking. If you try to teach it in conjunction with reinforcing another behavior, you will confuse your puppy.
2. Okay, now realize that up until now, snatching that treat out of your hand probably worked really well for your puppy. You likely started holding it at the very tips of your fingers (trying to keep them out of harm's way), which meant that it was released very quickly if he snapped at all. So... you have to make that behavior STOP WORKING for him.
3. Take a tasty treat and have it in the palm of your hand, then make a soft fist with that hand. Offer that hand to your puppy, and grin & bear it at first if he bites at your hand (perhaps wear gloves). But, be sure to NOT open your hand while that is going on! Simply wait him out. When he stops touching you with his teeth, and perhaps nibbles or licks instead, tell him "Gentle" and slowly open your hand to reveal the treat & let him have it.
4. Continue, keeping the treats hidden in your hand. That way if he does bite at your hand, you will be able to resist dropping the treat. Remember... we don't want that behavior to work any more! Instead, we want your puppy to learn that gentle nibbling and/or licking is what works now to release that treat!
5. If you continue to say "Gentle" or "Easy" while working on this, he will begin to associate that word with the behavior. Then you can start to expect that gentle treat-taking whenever he earns one. If he slips up and starts to get rough, say "Ah ah!" and pull your hand away. Then offer the treat again, reminding him to be "Gentle".

Happy treating!

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*using positive methods to teach people how to teach their pets!