



Excessive Mouthing, Biting, or Handling Intolerance in Doberman Puppies

When a puppy is separated from its litter or mom before 8 weeks, there can be significant negative developmental effects. As they are still in their formative weeks, we have a chance to work with them on these issues and hopefully resolve them before they become much worse issues in adulthood. A puppy with these issues should always receive **committed, daily training and exercises**. Issues stemming from early separation include:

- **Excessive mouthing or biting.** Most puppies can get mouthy; it is very normal in even well-adjusted puppies. Puppies that seem to excessively bite, and/or bite down hard, causing punctures and scrapes to your body, have an inappropriate lack of bite inhibition. They may have missed out on corrections from their mom and littermates. We want to prevent this from continuing into adulthood.
- **Lack of tolerance to touch, noise, or visual stimulation.** Maybe the puppy growls and snaps if you hold its feet. Maybe it cowers and pees if it hears a loud noise. Maybe it squirms violently if you try to hold it. These are all examples of lack of tolerance. Remember, without their litter, puppies like this missed out on hundreds of learning events each day.

What can you do about it? Here are some important exercises:

Handling Exercises

We need to help puppy catch up! We need to handle, handle, handle hundreds of times per day; every square inch, including toes, tails, nails, mouth, inner ears, and more. Let's slow that down, so we see how it literally comes into practice in your home:

- Always have treats with you, and if you can use a clicker as well, that is even better.
- Start by touching the puppy in areas they are most comfortable with (areas that don't cause them to snap, growl, mouth-orient, or cower in fear). Touch, click, treat.
- If that went well, continue on to new areas. If they respond positively, touch, click, treat.
- The second the dog snaps, growls, mouth-orient, or has a negative reaction, STOP. Go back to the last body part they had success with. Touch, click, treat. End there.
- Start again a little later, and continue on. This could take time, but ultimately we want to get to a spot where we can touch anywhere. We are using serotonin to reset the touch barrier threshold.
- If you become overwhelmed, or get confused with the responses you are getting, a trainer can help get you back on track.

We want to go slow so we can build up to success, but not too slow. A lot of touching will really help the puppy improve. Do not hesitate to reach out for help if this isn't improving after a couple days. You have a short window to work on this and it is very important!

Tolerance Exercises

These exercises are very similar, however they are a bit more invasive. With handling, you were just touching. With tolerance, you will do longer holds. You will also do these exercises less often - maybe once or twice per day.

- Once the puppy has integrated a couple days into your home, and they have a stable energy about them, we can start to get a bit more invasive.
- Start by once or twice per day, poking the puppy, or bumping into the puppy. If they react confidently and positively, click and treat.



- Next, start using some of your handling exercises and incorporate “holds” - you may hold their paw for 10 seconds, or hold them on their back like a baby in your arms. Click and treat. Again, if there is any negative reaction or mouthing/biting, go back to the things that were successful, and build up to this.

Replace, Don't Reprimand

Outside of these exercises, as you work with the pup, you still may have to work on and deal with excessive mouthing or biting. The first rule of thumb is not to verbally reprimand the puppy. They do not understand. Instead, always have a toy ready to replace for mouthing. Mouth this toy, not my arm. Give positive words when the dog redirects its mouthing to the toy. If mouthing is totally out of control, and you are losing your cool, use the crate to take a break. Do not make it a punishment. They can take a toy with them. You just need to stop the arousal.

Leave It, Take It Game

This game is a lot of fun, and can also prevent things like resource guarding. Through a simple game, you can teach your puppy to trade you objects. Repeating this game regularly will develop great basic cues and your dog will be great at “Leave it!” [See the easy steps here.](#)

Nothing Working?

Working on mouthing takes a lot of [patience](#) and repetition. Don't give up! Sometimes, excessively mouthing requires a level of professional insight custom to the situation. We do not recommend things like yelping, or pinching the puppy's mouth. However, if mouthing persists, contact a professional trainer and they may determine that more out of the box methods like these may be appropriate. Consulting a trainer before implementing true corrections is important as you consider the larger picture for training your pup.