

### Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

### Transcript

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SG Hey everybody. Welcome to Shaped By Dog. I am Susan Garrett. And today, if you own a puppy, you're going to love this episode. But if you don't own a puppy, do not turn away because there's a lot of great dog training understanding to be gleaned by studying puppies. And I'm going to let you know how you might be part of the reason why your friend's puppy bites. Yeah, true story. Stick with me on this one.

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Today I'm going to share with you the protocol that I have used that has worked for me over the last 30 years on helping my puppies understand that a biting a human is inappropriate communication. We're going to talk about first, the why it is necessary for puppies to bite. Don't be bent out of shape that your puppy bites. Actually, let's just take a moment and celebrate. Raise the roof. Your puppy is biting. That is an incredibly good thing. Yes, you heard me right. It's a really, really good thing. Puppies need to bite to understand how to bite. You're going to say, well, I don't want my dog to know how to bite.

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Yeah, here's the thing. Imagine you're out on a third-floor balcony and the guardrail breaks and you're about to fall. What do you do? You instantly grab. Right. You have hands that can grab. Dogs don't have opposable thumbs. They can't grab. The only thing they can do to react is to use their mouth. That's the only thing that they have, that they can actually grasp something with.

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And so, if they're going to use a mouth at a moment of stress, we want it to be what's called inhibited bite. And so, what we want to teach them is what we refer to as an acquired inhibited bite. And I'm going to share with you today, how you can teach your puppy just that. And I will tell you that my knowledge of how puppies actually shaped other puppies to bite. Go back to episode five on Shaped by Dog, where I talk about how dogs actually shaped. Now they don't, you know get out of clicker and think, Oh, I'm going to watch what they're doing. Their behavior just shapes an alternate behavior from another puppy.

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I learned this when my Jack Russell Terrier, Twister back in early nineties had a puppy, a single puppy, which is not a good thing. You really, really need litter mates to help teach puppies things like bite inhibition. And so, I had a friend who had a litter of Border Collies born the same day. She let me raise one of her puppies with my singleton Jack Russell. They were kind of funny seeing them in the wellbeing box together. By the time they were about three or four weeks, the time puppies normally start playing games like bitey face, the Border Collie was at least two, maybe more, almost three times the size of the little Jack Russell.

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And so, the first time this Border Collie said, hey, let's play. And he came like, you know, bam! down on this Jack Russell. The Jack Russell turned his head towards the wall and just curled up in this little ball. And I thought, oh what's wrong with that Jack Russell puppy. I mean, they're usually game to play.



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This happened several more times over the course of the day. The Border Collie would come in and body slam him. The Jack Russell would just turn his head against the wall and go into this little rock and wouldn't acknowledge. The next day that Border Collie puppy kind of came on its belly and reached out with one paw and touched the Jack Russell. And then the Jack Russell kind of reached out with his paw and touch the Border Collie. And they started doing pushy paws. And before you know it, they're playing bitey face. And within a day or two, the Jack Russell was beating the crap out of the Border Collie puppy. And that's the way, you know, it should be. Because according to the world of Jack Russells.

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Now listen, I'm going to share with you, if you are listening to this podcast, go down and click on the YouTube link. I'm going to put some demos in this podcast of some of the things that I'm talking about. So, you might want to watch this one on YouTube.

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So, puppies bite to learn that it's not appropriate to give a full on, you know, bite draw blood pullout flesh kind of bite every time. They learn to inhibit the bite. Which is super, super important because they're domesticated creatures and it's inconvenient if we have to stitch ourselves up every time we play with our puppies. The way we go about continuing the lessons that their mother taught them, and their litter mates taught them about how to inhibit your bite is two things.

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There's two parts of the biting we need to look at. It's how often they bite us. How many times a day we get bit and how hard they bite us. So those are the two things that we're going to zero in on. In actual fact, if you keep track of the number of times you get bit, and you only focused on how hard that bite is, the number of times you get bit would actually go down as well.

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When I had Swagger, who was also a singleton and didn't have litter mates, when he was a young puppy, he would bite me upwards of 30 times a day. By using the protocol I'm going to share with you today, it went to nothing. But I need you to understand puppies bite. So, if you've got small children and you're raising a puppy, please, please, please supervise anytime they're together. It's easy for a child to get bit and they're more sensitive if they do get bit and you could create fear that is unnecessary, a fear of your dog or puppy. We don't want that. Supervise anytime that your puppy is out with your children. Follow this protocol. Eventually your kids will be able to follow this protocol.

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What we need to do first is, number one, keep track of how many times in a day you get bit. And then we're going to categorize how hard those bites were. I categorize them by five categories, and this is just something that I've done so that I can keep track of what's going on. The goal of what we want, where we want our dogs to be is a place where the dog or the puppy, if they their mouth on human flesh, they immediately take it off, and go about their business. They're not worried about it. And I call that the 'oops, my bad'. So, it's immediately they touch and it's oops, my bad, I'm going back to what we were doing, we were playing. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to touch your flesh. That's cool. There isn't any pain associated with it. That's oops, my bad.



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Now the level before we get to that is, they hit us, they don't make a mark. It might be the pressure of their teeth hitting us and they might as a puppy, you know, not be in a hurry to get off, of our hand or pant leg. I consider if a puppy grabs your clothing the same as them biting you. All right. So that's a good thing to keep in mind. Level two is, I'm trying to be good. So, they will eventually get off on their own, but it's not, like they might bite you once or twice and then go, oh yeah, yeah, we were doing something else. That's I'm trying to be good stage.

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The third level before that is where the puppy will bite you and they leave the little indentations of their teeth. You can see the little marks on your skin. Especially if they're the little needle ones. They hurt, but if they haven't gone through, then they are what I call showing some awareness. That is level three, they're showing some awareness that they shouldn't be clamping down. Before that you might actually receive punctures or torn clothing. That is a, what I would call the puppy is oblivious to how hard they are biting. And there's things that you are doing that might be contributing to that. And I'll get to that in a second.

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The level four is you're getting punctures, they're drawing blood, or they're tearing fabric. Now, if you've got little sharp little needles, it might not take much pressure for you to be drawing blood, especially if your owner is a little bit older, it's got delicate skin. Doesn't matter, it's still the same level. Level five is code red. That's where the puppy might bite draw blood and re grip and sink their teeth in harder, or they might give their head a shake while they've got a hold and they're drawing blood, they might keep aggressing up the arm.

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That is code red, and that is unusual puppy behavior. And that is call a veterinarian behaviorist. Because you very likely have a problem. It could have you've escalated it and you could got to that, but that's the four levels. And I honestly have never seen in one of my puppies a code red. That it's one of the first four and you are focused on moving them down into so that they're all the, oops, my bad and I didn't mean to touch you and I'm not touching you again.

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Now that we have these five evaluations, you can keep track of how many times you get bit and keep track of what kind of a bite was it and we're moving so that you can see progress. You can see you're heading in the right direction. But in order to head towards the right direction, you're going to need my protocol and you're going to need to know what you might be doing that is encouraging the biting or possibly even rewarding the biting. And you might not even be doing it with your own puppy. You might be doing it with somebody else's puppy. The first thing, and if you want to test out my theories on what encourages a puppy to bite, you might want to try this one.

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Go to the litter of puppies, seven, eight-week-old puppies that are kind of running around a room and lay down flat on your stomach and turn your face up so that your face is at their face and I promise you you're getting bit. The honker is going to get bit, your hair is going to get pulled, you are going to get bit. So, my point is where you position yourself could be encouraging your puppy to bite you.



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So, the lower you are in proximity to them, the more likely you're going to get bit. Now that could be, there are some games that I'll play with my puppies and I'll get low and if I get them into a heightened state of arousal, I have had a puppy turn and just nail me in the face and actually draw blood. Is it the puppy's fault? Is there something wrong with that puppy? No, no. I needed to evaluate was that puppy's acquired bite inhibition far enough along that I should have put myself in that position, that lower body position.

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So, number one thing that you can do to contribute or to deter the puppy biting is to be aware of your body position relative to the puppy. Number two, and this is a pet peeve of mine, is when you greet a puppy or other people's puppy, this is where you might be encouraging your friend's puppy to bite. People greet a puppy by grabbing the muzzle and giving it a shake, Oh, how cute is that little puppy! They give the muscle a little shake and they're encouraging the puppy to bite at their hands.

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And it's like, you're playing bitey face with another puppy, but what you're actually teaching that puppy is human hands are the same as puppy mouths. We bite, they bite us, and we bite them and everything's good. Please, please, please. Don't face wrestle with a puppy. I'm going to put in a little Asterix.

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I might go to face wrestle with a puppy once I've got them to the, oops, my bad stage, a bite inhibition just to test how good that bite inhibition is. But please, please, if you see somebody grabbing a puppy's muzzle and giving it a little shake, like a game, no, no. You were setting somebody up to get bit, not a good thing.

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Those are two things. Your body position, how you grab a muzzle and shake. This is a biggie. So often when a puppy makes contact with a body part, the person tries to pull it away. And your hand becomes prey. That actually could be what is encouraging your puppy to bite harder, because they're going to bite and try to hang on because that thing's going away.

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It takes some discipline on your part and part of my protocol is to freeze when you're bit. Do not pull the body part away. And yeah. It might hurt, but you know what? You can be tough. You can tough for a little bit. Consider, are you viewed as prey? So sometimes walking across the floor, shuffling your feet, wearing certain slippers, the puppy prey instinct might be turned on. They're dogs, they're prey driven and they start biting at your feet. That could be part of what's engaging the prey, not saying it's right or wrong, but that is the way the puppy brain works. So, your lowered body position, greeting the puppy not so good, are you moving body parts becoming prey?

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Now these next ones, these are ones that you need to be considering all the time. The first ones you can eliminate right off the bat, right? I've educated you. You know that. These next ones, number one is there pain?



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If you're a stroking a puppy or scratching them behind the ear and they bite you, consider, is there an ear infection? Is there some pain somewhere? So, don't rule out pain as a reason. For remember what I said, that's the only way that they have to communicate. They're falling off that third story. They're grabbing something. Number two, has that puppy been pent up, has not had mental stimulation or exercise or physical exercise during that day. Their likelihood of biting is going to escalate if they haven't had that outlet for their mental and physical stimulation.

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Number two. This is actually number five, but on my list of things I really consider every time you're interacting with a puppy is, is that puppy overtired. Have they been out for too long? Puppies need a lot of sleep. A lot of sleep people. Is that puppy hungry? Puppy should be fed at least three times a day. So, if it's been a long time between meals, depending on what the pup has been doing, they could be over hungry. Over hungry, they're more likely to be bitey with less bite inhibition.

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Are they overexcited? That is a really, really common reason people get bit. And it's something that I do once I get my puppy down to the oops, my bad stage of bite inhibition, I increase the excitement to see if they will bite me. Overexcitement is easy when we're playing with our puppies and it's easy for them to bite. That doesn't mean don't get them excited because remember we need them to bite you occasionally for them to learn that they shouldn't be biting you at all. Physically or mentally they're pent up, they haven't had enough stimulation, overtired, over hungry, overexcited or in pain. That's a checklist you should go through.

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Okay, now the protocol. First thing when I get bit, as I mentioned, I freeze. So, if my hands are out, I just lock my elbows. I don't bring my hands in cause that's moving. I just lock my elbows to my ribs, and I freeze. Everything is solid. I don't say anything, and I don't do anything. So, step one of the protocol, freeze, evaluate. Run through your brain the checklist. Your body position, the dog that... has a puppy eaten? Are they overtired? Have they been stimulated? Are they overexcited? Like run through that checklist while you're frozen there.

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So, it should take you like two seconds. While I'm frozen, I'm evaluating, did the puppy bite and come off. So, if they did come off, I skipped step two and go to step three, which is praise them for taking their mouth off of me. If they didn't, so, this is a series of events. I'm playing with a puppy; the puppy bites me, I freeze, the puppy doesn't come off or just keeps mouthing me, and then I go to the vocalization, which could be just saying, "Aw!". Now for me, I like to yelp like a puppy and I'm really good at like yelping, like a puppy, but a lot of people aren't that good at yelping, like a puppy. So just go ahead and say, "Aw!", but I do, "Ah!", and that gets the puppy's attention, like 'w w w what was that? I I I didn't know you were a puppy. Weird'.

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So, it's vocalizing. Step one is freezing. Evaluate, is a puppy off you. If they are off you go right to step three, which is praising. If they're not then yelp and then evaluate, did they come off you, then praise. And when you're praising, you're praising in a way that's calming.



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So, you're not going, "Oh my God! That's so good! You got off of me! I'm so happy! Thank you for getting your mouth off me". Because that's just going to get yourself bit again. So calm praise. "Good. Super good choice, buddy". And then evaluate, do they stay, keep their mouth away from you when you're praising, then you go to the next step, step four, which is pat. Stroke the puppy for not biting you.

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And that stroking may cause them to bite you again. But that's the cycle. You're just going to then freeze, evaluate. They come off, praise, evaluate, and then stroke them again. Now, if you get through step one, two, three, four, and they don't put their mouth back on you, then you go back and repeat what you were doing that caused the puppy to bite you in the first place.

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But Susan, I might get bit again. True story, you might. You're going to go through this keep cycle... You're going to keep going through the cycle. Puppies are curious. They use their mouth to investigate, and right now they might be investigating you. That's just how it works. Now, what if you froze your puppy didn't get off, you yelped your puppy didn't get off. Now you are in a place where you are deciding is the puppy overtired? Are they over aroused? Are they hungry? If you're like, oh my gosh, the session went on too long. I shouldn't have, it's my bad. I would then take a chew bone, put it in the puppy's mouth, pick them up, put them in the crate, get them something to eat, or take them outside.

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Do what you know that puppy needs. But if you're like, no, I went through my checklist and I didn't. I would vocalize a little louder if they bit me. Now, one really important thing I forgot to say, I never train the puppy that when they're in this bitey phase, they're always on a leash. When I train with them.

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I'm going to say that again, guys, always train your puppy either in an enclosed area, like your or bathroom, like really super small. And even then, I think I would put them on a leash. When they're in that bitey phase, because then they can't do the fly by bites and run around and bites and run around that you can still pat them and talk to them, engage, engage with them. So super important.

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Okay. So, the protocol again. I got bit, freeze, evaluate, vocalize if I have to, evaluate, praise in a calm way, pat. Now, pat is again the Zen pat. It's not whacking them and go, "woo! That was really good. Thank you for not biting me!". You're going to get bit again. Calm praise, calm stroking, go back and try what you did the first place. If you didn't get bit that time, that's great. The puppy could be learning. I would do the same thing again a couple of times and maybe the next session up add a little bit more excitement to the situation to see if the puppy can make the same good choices.

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If on the other hand, the puppy couldn't make those good choices and you couldn't figure out why, and they're still biting at you, then I would suggest you abort, put the puppy away, do something calm or the next time you bring them out. So, it's freeze, vocalize if they still are biting me, just, I would keep vocalizing, "Aw!". They come back and bite you again, "Aw!". And then just like my little Jack Russell puppy, I can't play with you.



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Now I don't want you to say "I'm giving you a time out now! You'll bit me, you little turkey!". Because puppies, they're way too young. Puppies don't deserve time outs. Right? I put the puppy away, give them a chew bone, put them in an ex-pen only so that I can regroup and say, "what did I do wrong in that session and how can I be better for my puppy?".

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You cannot punish puppies for biting. Guys they're learning. We need to be patient. We'll all get through this puppy phase and think of all the amazing, good things that they give us to balance out the odd little bite on the arm. It will get better, always working towards the oops, my bad stage. And you will have a puppy that if, no matter what, no matter if, you know, your granddaughter stumbles and happens to fall on your puppy, when they're an adult dog, wakes them up out of a dead sleep, they're less likely to turn and snap at your granddaughter, because you went through these stages of building an inhibited bite.

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Next time I'm going to go through the games I play to help expedite the learning for the puppy. So, I have some games that I'm going to share with you and also answer the question, what do I do when I'm playing tug with my puppy and they redirect and grab my clothes or grab my arm?

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That's happening next time on Shaped By Dog.

### Resources:

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[Podcast Episode 5: What is Shaping and How Can Dogs Shape Us](#)

[Podcast Episode 6: The Art of Manipulation](#)



### About Susan

A world-leading educator of dog trainers, Susan is also one of the most successful agility competitors of the last three decades. She has won multiple Gold Medals at National or World Championship events with every dog she has ever owned over the past 30 years. Susan was one of the very first dog trainers to share knowledge online when she opened her "Clicker Dogs" website many years ago. Susan has helped hundreds of thousands of people enjoy a great relationship with their dogs through her workshops and keynote speaking around the world, award winning books, DVDs, magazine articles, blog posts, podcasts, free dog training and dog agility video series, and online dog training programs.



A natural teacher and an entertaining speaker, Susan is world renowned for her dog training knowledge and practical application of that knowledge. Her understanding of how to apply science-based learning principles to both competitive and family pet dog training has been pivotal in changing how dogs are trained.

Susan is now helping many thousands of dog owners in 82 countries have the best relationship possible with their dogs. The real joy for her comes from bringing confidence to dogs and their owner through playful interactions and relationship building games that are grounded firmly in the science of how animals learn.



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