

How To Stop Puppy Biting: Avoid Mistakes With Susan Garrett's Backup Plan

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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I believe I have done two or three podcast episodes previously on helping people who have [biting puppies](#). So why do I feel the need to do yet another one? Well, the truth is, I find myself with one of the bitiest puppies I've ever owned, and I thought, I've got more I can share on this topic. So let's dive in.

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Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. Today, I'm going to talk about what I feel are the top 10 reasons why puppies bite. The biggest mistakes people make that may encourage puppies to keep biting them. And one of the things that I haven't previously mentioned in any other podcast is what's a plan of action you can have to set up a prevention strategy to mitigate the number of times that you might get bit by a puppy and [a good plan B](#), a strategy of what to do in the midst of a bite.

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So, why do puppies bite? And, you know, there's probably a lot of reasons, but I've just narrowed it down to 10, actually 11, but 10 sounds sexier, doesn't it? Number one might be just the litter size that they were born in.

So, my dog Swagger, who's 12 and a half now, he was a singleton. And singletons get what they want, because there's no other puppies in the litter.

They're the only ones in the litter. There's no other puppies that you have to fight for anything for. So, when you're being raised in a human world where you don't get everything you want, then how puppies react as they use their mouth, so Swagger, I believe, has the title as the most bitey puppy I have ever raised, and I would have to guess that my young boy Prophet is probably running a close second.

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So I don't believe the litter size has anything to do with Prophet's biting because he came from a litter of ten, not a litter of one. But litter size is definitely one consideration for those of you who may have a singleton. And other considerations that I'm not listing are some breeds like Terriers, they may use their mouth more than other non-sporting breeds may or may not.

Alright, big reasons why puppies may bite. Number two, they're over stimulated, over excited, right? Like, if you have two puppies that are playing and you pick one up and say, "You've got to stop," and they are going to redirect that excitement on you. So that's a pretty common thing to happen.

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Another common reason why puppies bite is they're overtired. So there is a witching hour for all puppies and some puppies that have these times of the day, twice in a day, where they get super excited, they start getting the zoomies, and they get overtired, it's right on the cusp of "I just need a nap."

And when they go past that, that's when they start to nip more, grab up at you, grab your pant legs, grab your arms, grab anything they can.



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Number four is they might be hungry. So if I'm training a puppy who's super hungry and I haven't given them a little meal first, which by the way is a great thing to do before you train a young puppy, especially first thing in the morning, give them a little bit of a meal. And then you can feed the rest of the meal in the training. But a [puppy that's very hungry](#) will frustrate very, very quickly, and they are going to turn and nip more.

Now, that leads me into reason number five. Puppy is overly frustrated. So, it could be the way that the puppy is being raised, or the way that the puppy is being trained. There isn't enough clarity in their life. And so, they get frustrated. And when they get frustrated, the only way they can express that frustration is sometimes they vocalize, and then they nip. Sometimes they just, like, nip.

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So you have to look at how you set up your training plans, how you've set up the arrangement with your puppy in your life. Is that puppy overly frustrated because that will lead to biting.

Another thing that leads to biting is way too much confinement. There's so many needs that puppies have at a very young age and if they aren't being fulfilled because we're leaving them in the crate for long, long periods of time, getting them a little exercise and putting back in the crate for long, long periods of time, you may get a puppy that is going to nip because they're confined too much because a lot of their other needs are not being met.

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Now, some puppies, very rarely, but some puppies may nip because they're afraid. Now, that isn't a common reason, but it is a reason, so you have to look at the puppy's body language, and the only way that they know how to express themselves is to lunge and nip.

So, if that's the case, you have to provide a more enriching and clarifying environment for that puppy so that they don't feel the need to nip. They don't feel fearful in any situation.

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I think a very common reason why most puppies bite is they want your attention and puppy biting does work. Even if it's just for you to scold them, you turn and look at them or you swat at them, that it gets attention. So that's a reinforced behavior. And so they're going to come back to that.

If you have a puppy that's over the age of seven months and still biting, that could be a big reason why is, where is that biting being reinforced in their life? You might not be meaning to reinforce it, but it could be that it is being reinforced.

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And that leads me to the next point, and that is, previously reinforced behaviors get reinforced. So, your puppy may be biting because somebody told you, when the puppy bites, you put a toy in their mouth, or you put a bone in their mouth. Now, there is, on previous episodes, I have mentioned a sequence where there's a pause, evaluate, and then you might put an item for the puppy to chew in their mouth, but there is a pause in there.

I see so many people creating a [behavior chain](#) of every time they get bit, they put a toy in the puppy's mouth, or they put a bone in their mouth, and if that is the way they get these bones or toys, then guess what? Reinforcement builds behavior. They're going to continue to nip to get what it is they want.



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And sometimes you're flailing arms or screaming or yelling or trying to lash at them. That's reinforcing. Even though it may not mean for it to be, it is. Another reason puppies also might bite because there's just no appropriate chew items in their environment. So, how many things like [Kongs](#), or [wooden chews](#), or gummy chews, or maybe pizzles, things that are appropriate for a puppy, how many of those are in that puppy's environment? And if they don't have those things, they're going to be more likely to grab a pant leg or grab anything to have a good chew.

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Now, a big, big reason why puppies chew, and this may be the number one, but it definitely is a multiplier of almost all of the above, is that they're puppies. Puppies investigate with their mouth, especially when they're teething.

So, between the ages of, I don't know, four and a half to six or seven months, you may see puppies biting a lot more than they did previously. Personally, for me, I find my puppies bite the most between the ages of say, 8 weeks and 12 to 14 weeks because after that, it's really clear [what is appropriate and not appropriate](#) in my world and my puppies just stop biting me.

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So, I got to tell you, I have had puppies who have never bit after the age of 10 weeks old and that's the goal I always work towards. I haven't got it with my 12 week old, but we're heading in the right direction, I can tell you that. Now, hearing the list of why they bite, I think you can come up with some of the biggest mistakes that people might make.

But there's four biggies that I see. Number one, by far, is people's expectations of puppies are just too high. They are puppies. Everything goes in their mouth, have you noticed that? They pick up stones, they pick up flowers, they pick up sticks, they pick up everything. Everything they investigate with their mouth.

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So yeah, they're going to grab your hand, your pant leg, your sleeve. They're going to grab things. They are puppies. So please, lower your expectations. I'm not saying be okay with getting bit. That is not what I'm saying, I'm saying it's going to happen. So don't lose your cool. I think if you have this expectation that puppies may use their mouth. It's going to change the response that you're going to have if and when you do get bit.

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Number two I think it comes down to lack and limitations. So these puppies are raised with not enough engagement, not enough age appropriate exercise, not enough appropriate chew things, not enough relationship building from their people.

And as I mentioned in [podcast episode number 232](#) where I talked about predatory sequence, some puppies just need things to chew or shred. I've had several of my puppies that love when I give them puppy bombs, the toilet paper rolls with cookies inside, they just shred them all up. Not all puppies like that.

Tater salad, for example, he just crushes it, gets the cookies out and leaves it. But a lot of my puppies just love to shred those things. So if we're not fulfilling the needs of the puppy, they are going to head in the direction we might not want to see them head towards.



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Number three, big, big mistakes that people make is the inappropriate reinforcement for the biting. When you get bit, if you give that puppy attention, if you swat at them, all the things that I mentioned previously on why puppies bite, it's a previously reinforced behavior or it's turned into a behavior chain. You bite, I give you something good to take your attention. I've seen people, when they get bit, throw cookies on the floor to distract the puppy. Well, if you consistently do that, you are reinforcing a behavior that might lead to the increased probability of that behavior happening.

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And the number four big mistake that I see people make is they have the puppy off leash way too often. So if you're in the backyard and the puppy's off leash and they get overexcited and they get the zoomies, they can fly by and nail you and they can take off and they can come back and nail you again. So, puppies are on leash in my world.

Now, do they get free time at my house where they're getting the zoomies and running around? Yes, they do. But that is a scheduled part of our day. And I'll share more of that schedule a little later in today's episode.

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But you should be training your puppy on leash. Either a leash on the ground, as you could see in some of my training videos it's not even in my hands it's just there, or a leash in your hands, depending on what you're doing. So training on a leash helps you to mitigate the biting very very quickly and you'll see how when I share the action steps, which is coming up next.

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The number one best way to stop puppy biting, is to prevent it. And I've got to tell you, that's an impossible chore. I don't know that it's possible to raise a puppy and never have that puppy put their mouth on your body or a piece of clothing. I don't know that it's possible, but we sure can mitigate the number of times it happens, that's number one. Number two, we need to have a plan B of what do we do when we get bit or nipped or our clothing grabbed.

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So, prevention happens by engaging the brain, engaging the body, and developing and building that connection, that relationship with the puppy. And here's the great news, while you are building the body and building the brain. If you're doing it in the ways that I'm suggesting by playing [effective, intentional games with the puppy](#), then building the brain and building the body leads to building and deepening that connection and relationship.

So, win, win, win. So, building the body, that's things like playing restraint recalls, or [tug games](#), or some puppy appropriate fitness like work on a plank, or even just the act of playing [Recaller games](#). Those are things that are fitness type exercise that build the body.

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Now, a lot of people get a puppy, they instantly want to take it for a big walk. I got to tell you, that's not something that I do very often. I've had my puppy for 10 days, and he has been on a walk twice. Because he's not really leash trained. And so if we go for a walk, which around the property, we've done that twice, he's going to pull or do things inappropriate. He's not going to be as attracted to me as he is going to be to this big new environment that he gets to explore.



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So I feel puppies up to 14, 15 weeks old can get a lot of exercise in the training that you're doing with them.

So, take them on a short walk, maybe once they've had their third set of vaccines, maybe then. But there really isn't any need if you're doing all of those other things, engaging their brains, doing things like Recaller games, or the games I mentioned [in podcast episode number 18](#), where I talk about games that create bite inhibition in your puppy.

And all of the other great [puppy training games](#) that you'll find on my YouTube channel. All of those things help develop the puppy's brains. Things like using food puzzles, give the puppy an opportunity to use their nose, use their body, use their brain, like those things scheduled into your puppy's day.

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Not the same thing every day, like sometimes I'll give Prophet puppy bombs, some days I'll give him one puppy puzzle, another day I'll give him a different puppy puzzle, but every day involves training. So those three things are a big part of prevention.

Engaging the brain, engaging the body, focusing on things that help develop the connection, the relationship you have with your puppy.

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So your plan of action, number one, you've got to have a schedule. So, when will the puppy sleep? And when will the puppy be trained? AKA when will you be playing these games? Those training sessions, I like to have as many as I can throughout the day. A minimum of three. And I might even get five in on the weekends.

And those training sessions, they can be as long as like, two to three minutes maximum. If I'm feeding his breakfast, those sessions might be a little bit longer. But you don't have to have hours and hours to train your puppy.

It's quality, intentional training. It's playing these games in a way where you practice your mechanics without the puppy so that they can be smooth mechanics with the puppy. That is a huge part of the success in puppy training.

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So, you've scheduled your training, your gated community set up in the middle of your living area. So for me, that's in my kitchen where the puppy has some toys, some chew things that if somebody's in the house and somebody can hear what's going on, then he can be loose in that gated community.

Now, there may come a time where I have to put a lid on that gated community if he looks like he might be thinking of jumping out or climbing out. But for the most part, my puppies have not done that so I can get by without a lid on the gated community.

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But there's time in the gated community, there's time in a crate. So if we're going out, the puppy will be in his crate. It is somewhere in the house. We have several crates around the house for him. And also schedule time out with the other dogs and with us for him to just run around.

He loves playing in my bedroom, loves entertaining himself at night in my bedroom, running around, chasing himself, growling at himself, playing with his toys.



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So that's the schedule. How do you work all of that into your everyday life?

Now, I know you're all busy, I'm busy too. You may think, "yeah, she's a dog trainer. She can train her puppy all day." That's not the case. I still have a heavy workload.

And so I schedule the sessions of training in knowing what other appointments I have or what other commitments I have, what other podcasts I have to record during that day. So, scheduling is a big part of your action plan to mitigate the number of times that you get bit in a day.

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Number two, and I've mentioned this on [podcast episode number 17](#) where I talked about puppy biting, is you need to record keep. Record keep both your dog training with the puppy and record keep behavior incidences.

Things like when you got bit. What was the puppy doing? What happened before? What did you do after? Record keeping is a great way to improve behaviors because things that get tracked get improved.

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Action plan number three is intentional training games. Now, on top of the ones I've already mentioned, the Recaller games, the games that you can find for free on my YouTube channel, I also want to encourage you to do a little bit of [cooperative care](#).

So, the first things that I do with my puppies is I work on being able to cut their nails. So, they need to have a [relaxation protocol](#), which podcast [episode number 106 and 107](#), I talked about how I create that. So, I want a way that I can get that puppy to relax. We have a massage therapist that comes to the house once a week, and so they learn how to relax to get massaged, but I intentionally work that in as part of my training plan.

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Another thing that I intentionally work in that I encourage you to do, works into your plan B. That is, what happens when you get bit? Now, I don't want you to just play this game for a puppy that's getting bit. I think this is a great thing for every puppy to experience and I call it consent to console.

So, we want to be able to hold our puppy. Now, you might be listening to this with a 70 pound puppy and you're saying, "Susan, I am not holding that puppy." You will hold the puppy with all of their four paws on the ground. I may hold my puppy right now up in my arms. But we all still need to hold the puppy and so I suggest you all work on consent to console.

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It looks like this. You play the collar grab game. I've mentioned this game on the podcast many times. You can find it on podcast episode number 18.

Once the puppy knows the collar grab game, anytime you reach for their collar, they're going to go, "Oh, yeah, okay, here it is." So once you've got that, now we're going to add to that.

So grab the collar, and then put your arm over their shoulder and then feed them. Now we're going to introduce [ItsYerChoice](#) with those two skills. If you haven't played ItsYerChoice, you'll find a link to the show notes that will show you exactly the step by step that I use how to play ItsYerChoice.



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So I put a cookie out in front of my puppy. I put my thumb through the loop of their collar and my hand over the chest. So, if they get bouncing, say they're frustrated because I'm holding them back and they bounce up to nip me in the face, I've got their collar and I can just grab it and prevent any teeth coming near my face.

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So, I've got the collar looped with my thumb, I put my hand over and I just hold them. They are focusing on that cookie. And then I just give them their search cue and let them go. You are going to hold them a matter of milliseconds, my friend.

And we're going to build up until we can hold them closer, we can hold them longer, before we let them go and let them have that cookie.

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Eventually, you'll have that puppy staring at that cookie for maybe 10 or 20 seconds. Now you're going to do this without a cookie. Grab the collar, hold, just, we're going back to a millisecond and then say "cookie" and feed them. If you've got a little dog, you might be picking them up at this stage. Why do we want to do this?

Because there's going to come a time when a Veterinarian [needs to restrain your puppy](#). If you've done the conditioning just like the relaxation protocol, you'll have a puppy that is completely confident and completely okay with what's going on.

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How does this work into your plan B for puppy biting? Because if your puppy has got your pant leg who's grabbed your sleeve, you can grab the collar and just pull them in and hold them for a second.

If they are frustrated and they flail, that tells you that you either haven't conditioned this enough or you set the puppy up for failing because you didn't observe all the other things I mentioned in today's episode.

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If they flail, don't let go. Hold the puppy, take a deep breath when they relax, let go of the body, hang on to the collar, pat the puppy. If they turn to nip you again, you can just hold them again. If you've done all of the prevention, I promise you, it will be highly unlikely you will ever have to do the collar grab and hold.

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It's something I rarely have to do, but it's a great game to condition because all of our puppies are going to have to go to the Veterinarian and who knows if and when they're going to have to be restrained.

It gives them an opportunity to learn something great for the future. It gives you a plan B in case your puppy happens to nip you.

Okay, I'd love to get your feedback on this one. If you've got a puppy, let me know how it's going for you. Jump over to YouTube. Leave me a comment because hey, we're kindred spirits. We both have puppies right now. I'll see you next time right here on Shaped by Dog.





Episode: #234

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Learn How To Play ItsYerChoice:

<https://recallers.com/iycsummit-join/>

Resources:

[YouTube Playlist: Puppy Biting Help with Susan Garrett](#)

[Podcast Episode 228: Navigating Failure In Dog Training: What's Your Plan B?](#)

[Podcast Episode 225: Keep The Food Bowl! Why Dogs Don't Need 100% Hand Feeding](#)

[Podcast Episode 42: Behavior Chains: Are You Teaching Your Dog to be Bad to be Good?](#)

[Kongs](#)

[Wooden Chews](#)

[Podcast Episode 218: Puppy Development Stages And Your Dog's Behavior](#)

[Podcast Episode 232: Cracking The Canine Code: Prey Drive In Border Collies, Malinois And Other Breeds](#)

[YouTube Video: Susan Garrett's 5 Games for Puppies](#)

[Podcast Episode 89: Why Dogs Should Not Tug: The Truth Revealed](#)

[Podcast Episode 18: Puppy and Dog Training Games for Acquired Bite Inhibition](#)

[YouTube Playlist: Dog Training Games with Susan Garrett](#)

[Podcast Episode 17: Help! How Do I STOP Puppy Biting?!](#)

[YouTube Playlist: Cooperative Care and Consent in Dog Training with Susan Garrett](#)

[Podcast Episode 191: Get Your Dog To Calm Down With This Common Sense Protocol For Relaxation](#)

[Podcast Episode 106: Consent In Dog Training: The Misuse, Misunderstanding And Misapplication](#)

[Podcast Episode 107: Pedicure Please: 3 Steps To Dog Nail Trimming Or Grooming Success At Home!](#)

[YouTube Video: Vet Visits For Dogs: How To Create A Positive Experience For Everyone](#)



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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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