



## Seeking advice on 3 Month Old Berner Puppy biting/resource guarding?

*The following posts appeared on the Berner-I in February, 2009.*

I have a 3 month old female. She play bites all the time. Even with our 2 1/2 year old Chocolate lab. She has chew toys to chew on and we correct her continually when she bites at us. I give her pig ears ..... my husband reached down to pet her and she growled and snapped at him several times. We took the ear away several times while telling her no when she growled.

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**Suggestions on how to manage puppy biting and resource guarding offered by Vilma Briggs...**  
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"A 3 month old puppy who play bites is a NORMAL puppy. This is what all puppies do, they will mouth you and each other in play. You stated that you "correct her continuously" for this. Sounds like it isnt working!! No surprise.

I would avoid punishment based training, especially in this situation. Violence only begets more violence - - look at the Middle East.

The best thing to do for excessive puppy mouthing is to YELP loudly in pain "Ouch!!!" like an injured littermate, stop playing, then stand up and turn away from her for about 5 seconds. (You basically take away what she wants, which is your companionship.) Then after 5 secs you smile and turn back to her and offer her SOMETHING ELSE to put her mouth on, an appropriate toy for her to grab like a

stuffed fleece to tug and mouth. She doesn't have fingers. She has nothing else to grab with except her mouth. Play tug for a few minutes, then ask her to "Give" it to you and trade her for a treat. Don't just leave the toy on the floor, play WITH her - - make the toy move, make it fun!! Then lure her into a sit or a down and reward w/ the treat ..... then start playing again. Take frequent short little breaks like this to calm down periodically while playing, so she can learn to calm herself and maintain self control.

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As far as her resource guarding goes (that means the puppy growling when your husband took away her "valued resource" of the pig's ear, a real treasure) .....well, I would also stop punishing her for this, and strongly suggest you modify her behavior from a different approach. Right now she is worried and upset when you approach her, fearing you will take the treasured pig's ear away. And then you DO! Well, this will only make her MORE worried. A wolf or feral dog who did not protect his supper did not survive to make little wolves and little feral dogs, so his genes were not passed on - - Darwin at work, survival of the fittest. In our world today, a different behavior of course is a superior survival skill, but a dog's genetic material has only drifted so far from the original.

Instead of punishing your puppy for growling, I would work to change the way she feels about you approaching when she has a pig's ear. I would approach her and GIVE HER SOMETHING BETTER ..... as you walk up to her, toss a handful of cheese or hot dog slices or leftover pepperoni or chicken to her.

She will be so pleasantly surprised. Then you walk away. Repeat this step at least a dozen times per day, over 2 - 3 days, until she looks up and is HAPPY to see you coming as she chews her pig's ear! Then you can go to the next step ..... hand her tasty treats (many of them) while you touch the pig's ear w/ one finger, then walk away. The next step is to actually take it away for just a second and give it back immediately, but only in TRADE for a half dozen tasty treats, one at a time in rapid succession. Be sure you are using really high value GOOD food as treats, so it is worth her while, not lousy old boring store bought "dog treats."

You will want to continue to practice this skill regularly for at least the first year of her life. This could easily become an extremely serious problem when she weighs 80 lbs and a child approaches her w/ a bone, or his dropped ice cream cone. Bites to children are often to the face, due to the proximity.

An excellent book to read is called, **Mine! A guide to resource guarding in dogs** by Jean Donaldson, available at <http://www.DogWise.com>