

# Play Etiquette: Pups & Seniors

**Q** Help! My new puppy is super sweet, super cute and super energetic. And, she takes great delight in nipping the legs of my gentle older dog. I don't want my older dog to lose her patience and growl or bite back. What can I do to help my pup learn proper canine play etiquette?

● Arden Moore ● Steve Brooks

**W**ELCOME TO THE WONDER YEAR, the first year with your puppy whose energetic antics make you wonder where your sanity went and a year that tries the patience of your calmer adult dog. The good news is that you and your dog can partner on developing proper canine play etiquette in your pup.

For starters, observe the level of reaction displayed from your adult dog. A mild growl or pawing are safe and true dog actions designed to teach the pup that she is being annoying and needs to tone it down. Watch how the pup responds. If she backs off, calmly praise both (starting with your adult dog to help the pup know she ranks below in the family hierarchy) and perhaps offer small bite-sized treats to reinforce calmer interactions.

Intercede if the pup is getting too rough and the older dog yelps or air snaps back – signals of pain (possibly due to arthritis) and irritation that can escalate to biting. Clap your hands or stomp to disrupt the pup and then call her over in a happy voice to divert her attention.

Be sure to give your older dog a no-pup zone place where she can nap or relax each day without the worry of being pestered by the pup. Use this time to work one-on-one with your pup. I encourage you to enroll together in a positive puppy obedience class and then practice your “homework” with the pup while your older dog naps. Exercise your pup’s mind and body daily with brisk walks, leash exercises, food puzzle games and more so that she is physically and mentally tired.

Limit access to items that can trigger resource guarding in your home until the pair have developed a kinship. Keep dog toys in a toy chest or other location out of paw’s reach. Start and stop all games involving toys. Pick up empty food bowls after meals. Ensure there are ample doggy beds in the house.

Finally, display signals that you are the benevolent leader in the house – the person your pup wants to most impress. Do this by being calm, consistent and concise in your mannerism and avoid being loud, wordy or over excited to convey to the pup that more rewards come by being well-mannered and playing nice with the older dog. Good luck! 🐾

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**G**ROWLING IS ACTUALLY A GOOD THING! A growl is a *warning*. A growl is one way a dog communicates that they are uncomfortable. A growl is being patient. Without the growl, your older dog may fight back without warning, so be ready to intervene:

- The instant you sense one of the dogs not enjoying themselves
- Aggression or humping (older dogs with health conditions like arthritis may have a shorter fuse)
- Excessive leg or face biting
- If one dog is on their back for too long looking anxious or uncomfortable

It’s best to develop a relationship with your new pup before introducing them to other dogs in off-leash play fests! Each dog’s bond with you should be solid so they acknowledge their name, or better yet... come when called. When you sense trouble brewing, call back the canine that listens best.

Spend solo time throughout the day with each dog, not only for behavior management but to help build your human-canine bond. Work on getting your new dog to want to play with you more than the other dog.

Some dogs are very vocal when they play, which is not always a bad thing. It’s the silent dogs...the ones that are stiff and still that you need to worry about.

Signs that a dog is uneasy or on the verge of an aggressive outburst:

- Tucked or erect tail
- Ears back or forward
- A hard stare or wide eyes

Signs that a dog is comfortable with play:

- Jiggly-wiggly, relaxed, loose bodies and faces

Does your new dog display leg-nipping behavior only when you are present? If so, the dog may be doing it for attention. Work to modify behavior:

- Teach alternative behaviors to herding/nipping including: come, sit, down, or retrieve a toy
- Praise your new dog when they are not displaying herding behavior
- Tire your puppy out before they play with older dogs
- Work on teaching your pup a “leave it” command

Play this turn it on/turn it off game:

Practice revving up your new pup’s energy by playing wild with them, then two-three minutes later, stop the game abruptly and send them to their bed or a spot for a down/stay. Two-three minutes later, repeat the exercise. Be patient and consistent! 🐾

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**STEVE BROOKS (CPDT-KA)**, Certified Professional Dog Trainer (CPDT/KA), Canine Behavioral Expert and author of *DOG BITES* with STEVE BROOKS, shares 20 years of training techniques using “dog bites” as rewards for good behavior. [SteveBrooksK9U.com](http://SteveBrooksK9U.com)