

The original question had to do with a dog who takes treats with a snap, sometimes actually biting the hand of the treat giver. Deb Neufeld is from Florida. She is an obedience/rally judge and a contributor to "Front and Finish". This response is reprinted with permission.

Deb Neufeld in Florida
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Boxers/TFT
Cavalier at Rainbow Bridge
"Train, don't complain"

I've had dogs that act as you describe. They simply never learned bite inhibition. One of the first lessons I teach my dogs is that "I" control the treats. It's an important lesson for many reasons. Part of that lesson is also bite inhibition, which isn't taught harshly. First, I sit on the floor with treats in both hands (closed). I don't try to hide my hands -- they're just there, at a level where the dog can investigate my closed hands. (You mentioned that he backs away from closed hands, and that's fine -- if he does, tell him he's a good boy and open your hand to let him have the treat from your palm.) I let him nose my hand, paw if he wants, etc. When he stops to "think" about the problem, I say "good" and open one hand to allow the dog to eat the treat from my palm. If he starts actively trying to get the treats and I feel a tooth, I let out a decent, fairly high pitched "OUCH". If that stops him, I tell him what a good dog he is and open my hand to let him have the treat. You need to let him know it HURTS, and he needs to know it the instant a tooth makes contact with your hand, preferably while the tooth is still in contact with your hand. The reaction should be similar to a natural response puppies encounter while still with their litter siblings -- one pup gets too rough, the other pup "squeaks" and the game ends. He may have left the litter before he really understood that lesson, or he could have been an only puppy that didn't learn it at all. No matter, he can still learn it now. I've had a number of breeds and some real "knuckle crunchers" that learned to take food gently this way. Once he lightens up a bit, you can move to holding the treat in your fingers and using the same method to teach him to take it gently there. When holding it in your fingers, hold it "as you would a clicker". Bend your fingers closed and lay your thumb against the crook of your index finger. The treat goes between the crook and the thumb. You have control of the treat this way, and less fingers protruding to get nipped. If he's forceful in trying to take the treat and you have to say "ouch", you don't open your thumb to let him have the treat. When he's taking it gently, you release the thumb and let him have it. Smart dogs catch on fast.

You can also "hand feed" him his dinner to teach him how to take food more gently. You'll want to separate this lesson from his other training, and focus on one issue at a time. You can't really use the food effectively until you control the current issue, so try to tackle that first. Hand feeding is a great, focused session of teaching him to be more gentle.

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