



3 GAMES KIDS CAN PLAY TO STOP NIPPING

A Complete Step-by-Step Guide for Parents

Magic Hand • Find It • Recall Game

Turn puppy nipping into calm, confident interactions — 5 minutes at a time.

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Introduction

Why These Games Work

Before we dive into the games, let's understand why they work.

The Problem

Dogs don't bite hands because they're aggressive. They bite because:

- Flailing hands look like toys — children move fast and erratically, which triggers prey drive
- They've been accidentally reinforced — when a dog mouths and you pull away, it becomes a game of chase
- They're seeking attention — any reaction (even pushing them away) is rewarding

The Solution

These three games work because they change the dog's association with hands and redirect the biting behavior to appropriate outlets:

Game	What It Does	Why It Stops Nipping
Magic Hand	Teaches calm interaction with hands	Hands become "treat dispensers," not "bite targets"
Find It	Redirects mouth to the ground	Sniffing replaces mouthing, and it naturally calms the dog
Recall Game	Builds positive approach behavior	Dog learns that coming to a child = reward, not chase



Important Safety Rules Before You Start

For Parents

1. Always supervise — Never leave young children alone with a dog during these games
2. Use small, high-value treats — Break treats into pea-sized pieces (you'll be using a lot)
3. Keep sessions short — 3-5 minutes max per game, 2-3 times a day
4. End on a positive note — Always stop while the dog is still engaged and successful
5. Watch for stress signals — If the dog shows whale eye, lip licking, yawning, or turns away, take a break

For Children (Teach These Rules First)

Before playing any game, teach your child these 3 rules:

1. "Be a Tree" — If the dog gets too excited, freeze. Stand still with your hands tucked in or crossed over your chest. Turn your face away. This stops the game without punishment.
2. "No Grabbing" — Never grab the dog's face, collar, or try to pull them away. The games are designed so you don't need to touch the dog except to give treats calmly.
3. "Low and Slow" — Always move slowly around the dog. Fast movements = chase instinct.

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GAME 1: MAGIC HAND

The Goal

To teach the dog that:

- Biting = no treat
- Calm = treat appears

This rewires the dog's brain to see hands as a source of good things, not as something to bite.

What You Need

- High-value treats (cut into tiny pieces)
- A calm environment (no distractions)
- Your child's hand (with a parent close by)

Step-by-Step Instructions

Step 1: Prepare the Treat

✓ What To Do	✗ What NOT To Do
Place a small treat in the palm of your child's hand	Do not use large treats (the dog can grab them)
Close the fist completely — no treat visible	Do not leave any part of the treat sticking out
Make sure the fist is closed tight enough that the dog can't pry it open	Do not squeeze so tight that the dog gets frustrated

Step 2: Present the Fist

✓ What To Do	✗ What NOT To Do
Have your child hold out the closed fist, palm facing up or down	Do not wave the fist around — keep it still
Keep the fist at the dog's nose level (around chest height for medium dogs)	Do not place it too high (dog jumps) or too low (dog paws at it)
Remain completely still	Do not pull away or flinch when the dog sniffs

Step 3: Wait for Calm

This is the most important step.

Dog's Behavior	What Your Child Should Do
Sniffs the fist	Stay still — this is okay
Licks the fist	Stay still — this is okay



Dog's Behavior	What Your Child Should Do
Paws at the fist	Stay still — wait
Nips or mouths the fist	Stay still — wait. The dog learns biting doesn't work.
Pulls back, looks away, licks lips, sits, or stops mouthing	OPEN THE FIST AND GIVE THE TREAT!

Step 4: Reward Calmly

✓ What To Do	✗ What NOT To Do
Open the fist slowly	Do not drop the treat on the floor (this teaches the dog to look down, not at the hand)
Let the dog take the treat gently from the open palm	Do not throw the treat to the dog
Praise softly — "Good calm!"	Do not get overly excited (this over-stimulates the dog)

Step 5: Repeat

- Repeat steps 1-4 for 3-5 minutes
- The dog will learn they only get the treat when their mouth is off the hand
- Over time, the dog will start offering calm behavior faster — this is how you know it's working

Common Problems & Solutions

Problem	What's Happening	Solution
Dog is aggressively mouthing the fist	Dog is frustrated or doesn't understand the game	Back up. Start with the treat already visible in an open palm. Let the dog take it. Then close the fist halfway and repeat. Gradually close the fist more.
Dog gives up and walks away	Treat is too small or not high-value enough	Use a higher-value treat (e.g. chicken, cheese). Or the dog may be overstimulated — take a break and try again later.
Dog is pawing and scratching the child's hand	Dog is trying to "open" the fist	Child should remain still. When the dog pauses (even for a second), open the fist. The dog learns that pawing delays the reward, but stopping gets the treat faster.
Dog jumps on the child	Dog is over-aroused	Child should freeze and tuck hands away. Then restart the game with the dog in a sitting position.



Progression (How to Make It Harder)

Once the dog consistently waits calmly:

Level	What To Do
Level 1	Closed fist with treat inside. Open when dog stops mouthing.
Level 2	Closed fist with treat inside. Dog must sit before you open the fist.
Level 3	Child stands up. Dog must sit and wait while child holds the fist out.
Level 4	Child walks past the dog with a closed fist. If the dog stays calm, they stop and give the treat.





GAME 2: FIND IT

The Goal

To redirect the dog's mouth away from hands and toward the ground. Sniffing is a natural calming behavior for dogs — it lowers their heart rate and gives them a "job" to do.

What You Need

- High-value treats (tiny pieces)
- A clear floor space (no furniture in the way)
- A child who can drop treats easily

Step-by-Step Instructions

Step 1: Start With the Dog in Front of the Child

✓ What To Do	✗ What NOT To Do
Dog should be 1-2 feet away from the child	Do not start too close (dog will be too focused on the child)
Child stands still with hands at chest height	Do not have the child's hands dangling near the dog's mouth

Step 2: Say "Find It!"

✓ What To Do	✗ What NOT To Do
Child says "Find it!" in a happy, calm voice	Do not shout or squeal
Immediately toss a treat onto the ground right next to the child's feet	Do not drop the treat (it stays in one place — you want the dog to search)
The treat should land on the floor with a small bounce or roll	Do not toss the treat far away — keep it close

Step 3: Let the Dog Sniff and Search

✓ What To Do	✗ What NOT To Do
The dog's nose drops to the ground	Do not point at the treat — let the dog find it
Allow the dog to sniff and eat the treat	Do not try to move the dog's head toward the treat
While the dog is sniffing, the child should be completely still	Do not pet the dog or reach for them while they're eating

Step 4: While the Dog Is Sniffing, the Child Steps Back



✓ What To Do	✗ What NOT To Do
As soon as the dog's nose touches the floor, the child takes one small step back	Do not step back quickly or dramatically
The child repeats "Find it!" and tosses another treat	Do not toss the second treat until the dog has eaten the first one

Step 5: Repeat the Cycle

1. Toss treat
2. Dog sniffs
3. Dog eats
4. Child steps back
5. Toss another treat

Key Rule: The child never reaches toward the dog. The only interaction is tossing treats. This teaches the dog that the child's hands are not part of the game.

Common Problems & Solutions

Problem	What's Happening	Solution
Dog ignores the treat and keeps mouthing	Treat is too low-value OR dog is over-aroused	Use a higher-value treat. If the dog is too excited, stop and play the game after exercise.
Dog sniffs but then immediately returns to the child's hands	Dog has not learned the pattern yet	Toss treats more frequently. Keep the dog's nose busy.
Child is afraid to toss the treat	Normal!	Practice without the dog first — have the child toss treats on the floor with you as the "dog."
Dog is eating too quickly and trying to find more treats immediately	Dog is rushing	Toss treats in different directions (slightly left, slightly right) — this makes the dog work harder to find them and slows down eating.

Progression (How to Make It Harder)

Level	What To Do
Level 1	Toss treats in a small area (2-foot radius). Dog stays busy sniffing.
Level 2	Toss treats in a wider area (5-foot radius). Dog must search and walk to find them.
Level 3	Toss treats behind the dog. Dog must turn around and find them.



Level	What To Do
Level 4	Hide treats on the floor before the dog enters the room. Say "Find it!" and the dog searches for hidden treats (a scent game!).





GAME 3: RECALL GAME

The Goal

To teach the dog that coming to a child is rewarding. This flips the dog's association from "children are fun to chase" to "children are safe to approach."

What You Need

- High-value treats
- A 5-10 foot clear space
- A child
- A parent nearby for safety

Step-by-Step Instructions

Step 1: Start Close

✓ What To Do	✗ What NOT To Do
Child stands 3 feet away from the dog	Do not start too far away — the dog should be able to see and hear the child easily
Dog should be on a loose leash or in a safe, enclosed area	Do not start if the dog is distracted or over-excited

Step 2: Call the Dog

✓ What To Do	✗ What NOT To Do
Child says the dog's name in a happy, inviting voice	Do not shout or use a high-pitched squeaky voice
Child opens their arms slightly (not wide) to invite the dog	Do not reach toward the dog — let the dog come to the child
Child says "Come!" (or the dog's recall command) once	Do not repeat the command — say it once and wait

Step 3: Reward the Dog When They Arrive

CRITICAL RULE: The child does NOT reach for the dog.

✓ What To Do	✗ What NOT To Do
When the dog arrives, the child holds out an open palm with a treat	Do not grab the dog's collar, face, or body



✓ What To Do	✗ What NOT To Do
Let the dog take the treat calmly	Do not drop the treat on the floor (the dog should learn to take from the hand calmly)
Praise softly — "Good come!"	Do not get overly excited or loud

Step 4: The Child Steps Back and Repeats

✓ What To Do	✗ What NOT To Do
After the dog eats the treat, the child takes one small step back	Do not step back quickly or dramatically
Child calls the dog again	Do not follow the dog — wait for the dog to come to the child
Repeat 3-5 times	Do not do more than 5 repetitions in a row (keep it fun)

Step 5: Gradually Increase Distance

Distance	When To Move Up
3 feet	Start here
5 feet	Once the dog comes reliably from 3 feet
8 feet	Once the dog comes reliably from 5 feet
10 feet	Once the dog comes reliably from 8 feet
Across the room	Once the dog comes reliably from 10 feet

The "Never Reach" Rule — Explained

Why this is so important:

When a child reaches toward a dog, several things happen:

1. The dog may feel trapped or defensive
2. The dog's prey drive triggers (reaching hand = moving target)
3. The dog learns that "coming to the child" results in being grabbed — which makes them less likely to come next time

The correct sequence:

1. Dog comes to child
2. Child holds out treat



3. Dog takes treat
4. Child gives calm praise
5. Child never reaches for the dog's body or face

Common Problems & Solutions

Problem	What's Happening	Solution
Dog ignores the child	Dog is distracted, or the child's voice is not inviting	Use a higher-value treat. Have the parent call the dog first (using a happy voice) to model the behavior, then the child calls.
Dog comes but runs away after eating	Dog is "grabbing and leaving" — they don't see the child as the source of the reward	Have the child toss multiple treats (one at a time) in front of them. The dog stays longer to get more treats.
Dog jumps on the child	Dog is over-excited	Child should freeze, tuck hands away, and look down. Wait for 4 paws on the ground. Then reward calmly. If the dog jumps again, freeze again.
Child is scared to call the dog	Normal!	Practice with the parent standing next to the child. The parent calls the dog first, then the child calls the dog when the dog is already halfway there.
Dog comes but mouths the child's hand	Dog is still learning that hands are not toys	Go back to Game 1 (Magic Hand). The dog must learn calm hand interaction before playing this game.

Progression (How to Make It Harder)

Level	What To Do
Level 1	Child stands still and calls the dog from 3 feet away.
Level 2	Child calls the dog from across the room.
Level 3	Child calls the dog while the dog is eating from a bowl (teaches "interrupt and come" without punishment).
Level 4	Child calls the dog while the dog is sniffing outside (in a fenced area).
Level 5	Child calls the dog while the dog is playing with a toy.
Level 6	The child moves slightly while calling the dog (teaches the dog to follow the child).



Recap: The 3 Games at a Glance

Game	Core Action	What It Teaches	Time Per Session
Magic Hand	Closed fist with treat. Open when calm.	Hands = good things. Biting = no treat.	3-5 minutes
Find It	Toss treats on the ground. Dog sniffs and searches.	Mouth goes to the ground, not hands. Sniffing calms the dog.	3-5 minutes
Recall Game	Child calls dog. Dog comes. Dog gets treat.	Coming to children = reward. Children = safe.	3-5 minutes

Daily Schedule for Week 1

Day	Morning (5 min)	Afternoon (5 min)	Evening (5 min)
Monday	Magic Hand	Find It	Recall Game
Tuesday	Find It	Magic Hand	Recall Game
Wednesday	Magic Hand	Find It	Recall Game
Thursday	Find It	Magic Hand	Recall Game
Friday	Magic Hand	Find It	Recall Game
Saturday	All 3 Games (3 min each)	Rest	Rest
Sunday	Rest	All 3 Games (3 min each)	Rest

Note: Consistency is more important than length. 3-5 minutes of focused play is better than 20 minutes of unfocused play.



Troubleshooting: When Things Aren't Working

Issue	Likely Cause	Solution
Dog is not interested in treats	Treats are too low-value OR dog is full	Use cooked chicken, cheese, or hot dogs. Try before meals (when the dog is hungry).
Dog is too excited and can't focus	Dog needs exercise first	Walk the dog for 10 minutes before playing these games. A tired dog learns better.
Dog is mouthing harder	Dog is frustrated and needs a clearer signal	Go back to the easiest version of the game. Use a higher-value treat. Keep sessions shorter.
Child is anxious	Normal for the first few sessions	Parent should model the game first. Child watches. Then child tries with parent's support.
Dog is ignoring the child	Child's voice is too quiet or not exciting enough	Child should use a happy, slightly higher-pitched voice. Use treats that make a sound (e.g., in a crinkly bag).
The dog is regressing (getting worse)	You may be moving too fast	Go back to Level 1 of each game. Stay at Level 1 for 2-3 days before progressing.

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Final Notes for Parents

What To Expect

- Day 1-2: The dog will be confused. That's normal. Keep sessions short and fun.
- Day 3-4: The dog will start offering the behavior faster. You'll see less mouthing.
- Day 5-7: The dog will understand the games. You'll see a noticeable reduction in nipping.
- Week 2+: The games become routine. The dog will start showing calm behavior automatically when they see children.

When To Stop a Session

Stop immediately if:

- The dog is showing signs of stress (whale eye, lip licking, yawning, turning away)
- The child is scared or uncomfortable
- The dog is getting overly excited (jumping, barking, mouthing harder)
- The session has gone over 5 minutes

Always end on a positive note. Even if the dog only did one thing correctly, reward it and end the session. This keeps the dog wanting to play again.

When To Seek Professional Help

These games are designed for mild to moderate nipping. If your dog:

- Has broken skin (even once)
- Growls or snarls when approaching hands
- Shows stiff body language or staring when children are nearby
- Has a bite history with children

Stop these games immediately and contact a qualified, force-free dog behaviourist. Safety comes first.