



Destructive Chewing

Help your dog satisfy the urge to chew by providing satisfying toys.

Sooner or later every dog lover returns home to find some unexpected damage inflicted by their dog, or, more specifically, that dog's teeth. Although dogs make great use of their vision and sense of smell to explore the world, one of their favorite ways to take in new information is to put their mouths to work.

Fortunately, chewing can be directed onto appropriate items so your dog isn't destroying things you value or jeopardizing their own safety.

Until they've learned what they can and can't chew, however, it's your responsibility to manage the situation as much as possible, so they don't have the opportunity to chew on unacceptable objects.

Understand your dog

Puppies, like infants and toddlers, explore their world by putting objects in their mouths. And, like babies, they teethe for about six months, which usually creates some discomfort. Chewing not only facilitates teething but also makes sore gums feel better.

Adult dogs may engage in destructive chewing for any number of reasons. In order to deal with the behavior, you must first determine why your dog is chewing—and remember, they are not doing it to spite you. Possible reasons for destructive chewing include:

- As a puppy, they weren't taught what to chew and what not to chew.
- They're bored.
- They suffer from separation anxiety.
- Their behavior is fear-related.
- They want attention.

Be aware: You may need to consult a behavior professional for help with both separation anxiety and fear-related behaviors.

Teach what to chew

- **Take responsibility for your own belongings.** If you don't want it in your dog's mouth, don't make it available. Keep clothing, shoes, books, trash, eyeglasses and remote controls out of your dog's reach.
- **Give your dog toys that are clearly distinguishable from household goods.** Don't confuse them by offering shoes and socks as toys and then expecting them to distinguish between their shoe and yours.
- **Supervise your dog until they learn the house rules.** Keep them with you on their leash in the house so they can't make a mistake out of your sight. Confine them when you're unable to keep an eye on them. Choose a "safe place" that's dog-proof, and provide fresh water and "safe" toys. If your dog is crate trained, you may also place them in their crate for short periods of time.
- **Give your dog plenty of people-time.** Your dog won't know how to behave if you don't teach them alternatives to inappropriate behavior, and they can't learn these when they are in the yard by themselves.
- **Give your dog plenty of physical and mental exercise.** If your dog is bored, they'll find something to do to amuse themselves and you probably won't like the choices they make. On the other hand, a tired dog is a good dog, so make sure they get lots of physical and mental activity. The amount of exercise should be based on their age, health and breed characteristics.
- **If you catch your dog chewing on something they shouldn't,** interrupt the behavior with a loud noise. Offer them an acceptable chew toy instead, and praise them lavishly when they take the toy in their mouth.
- **Build a toy obsession in your dog.** Use their toys to feed them. At mealtimes, fill a Kong-type toy with their kibble.
- **If your puppy is teething, try freezing a wet washcloth for them to chew on.** The cold cloth will soothe their gums. Supervise your puppy so they don't chew and swallow any pieces of the washcloth.
- **Make items unpleasant to your dog.** Furniture and other items can be coated with a taste deterrent (such as Bitter Apple®) to make them unappealing.
- **Caution:** Supervise your dog when you first try one of these deterrents. Some dogs will chew an object even if it's coated with a taste deterrent. Also be aware that you must reapply some of these deterrents to maintain their effectiveness.
- **Offer your dog a treat in exchange for the item in their mouth.** As your dog catches on to this idea, you can add the command "Give" as their cue to release the object in exchange for the yummy treat.
- **Don't chase your dog** if they grab an object and run. If you chase them, you are only giving your dog what they want. Being chased by their human is fun! Instead call them to you or offer them a treat.
- **Have realistic expectations.** At some point your dog will inevitably chew up something you value; this is often part of the transition to a new home. Your dog needs time to learn the house rules and you need to remember to take precautions and keep things out of their reach.

Take care with punishment

If you discover a chewed item even minutes after they've chewed it, you're too late.

Animals associate punishment with what they're doing at the time they're being corrected. Your dog can't reason that, "I tore up those shoes an hour ago and that's why I'm being scolded now." Some people believe this is what a dog is thinking because they run and hide or because they "look guilty."

In reality, "guilty looks" are actually canine submissive postures that dogs show when they're threatened. When you're angry and upset, your dog feels threatened by your tone of voice, body postures and/or facial expressions, so they may hide or show submissive postures. Punishment after the fact will not only fail to eliminate the undesirable behavior, but it could also provoke other undesirable behaviors.

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About Napa Humane

The Humane Society of Napa County and SPCA, known as Napa Humane, is a non-profit organization incorporated in 1973. Recognizing that companion animals are an important part of healthy communities, we've grown to consider Napa Humane a community service organization. Our programs and services are designed to address the needs of animals – and also to provide support, education, and assistance for all the people who care for and about them.

Napa Humane is a private and independent organization that is supported by private donations by individuals and businesses, bequests, and fees for service. We receive no government funding, tax dollars or funding from national animal welfare organizations.

Our Mission

To promote the welfare of companion animals through protection, advocacy, education, and by example.