

Chewing: Puppies

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Chewing is a very normal behavior for puppies and dogs. They use their mouths for grasping food, gaining information about the environment, relieving boredom, and reducing tension. A puppy will be especially inclined to chew during the time he is getting his adult teeth in, usually between 3 and 6 months of age.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR PUPPY'S WORLD

Puppies usually pass time or break the boredom by using their mouths, which may result in destructive behavior. Household destruction occurs because puppies are simply entertaining themselves.

Sometimes we unwittingly contribute to a puppy's problem by improper training. Puppies are unable to determine the difference between old shoes and new shoes, or between stuffed toys and the corner of a stuffed couch. Don't buy toys for your puppy that resemble anything that is off limits to him.

Likewise, tug-of-war games can set the puppy up to fail. A puppy or dog entertained by tearing a towel is tempted to attack curtains fluttering in a breeze.

A LITTLE GUIDANCE

The first step in correcting a chewing problem is to guide your puppy's chewing toward acceptable chew toys.

- Choose a variety of good quality, safe products. When your puppy shows you what he likes, buy several more of the same type.
- Hollow rubber toys work well since biscuits can be wedged inside for your puppy to pry out. This gives him a job to do and helps keep his focus away from your possessions. Kong makes severable hollow toys that can be filled a treat to give your puppy hours of entertainment.
- Another way of keeping your puppy focused on putting his mouth on the toys is to teach him to play fetch.
- Never take proper chewing for granted. Take an active roll in rewarding desirable chewing with lots of encouragement and praise.
- Give your pet plenty of praise every time he chews on his toys. Occasionally give a small reward, to strongly reinforce the behavior.

PROTECTING YOUR POSSESSIONS!

Until you can trust your puppy, he must be under constant supervision or confined to a safe area. During times when he is with you, he might sneak off by himself to chew. Consider using a leash to keep him within eyesight. A crate, dog run, or safe room will keep him out of trouble when he cannot be watched.

As your puppy is allowed more freedom, he can be taught to avoid forbidden objects if you make them taste bad. Choose an effective, commercial, bitter- or hot-tasting spray to safeguard objects. If he has the habit of chewing specific items, such as clothing, make sure that all clothing is out of reach except one or two items that are sprayed with a bad-tasting spray.

Every day, move the items to new positions around the house. In four or five days change the type of item. This teaches the dog to leave your clothing alone because he associates them with a bad taste.

"Booby traps" are successful since they punish your puppy during the act and do not require your presence. A stack of empty beverage cans set up to fall over when something moves can be effective in safeguarding certain objects. Motion-activated alarms are often effective in teaching a puppy to stay off furniture or out of plants.

WHAT NOT TO DO

- Corrections and reprimands are rarely effective by themselves.
- Under no circumstances should your puppy be spanked, slapped, kicked, or physically punished in any way. There is a risk he will become hand shy or a fear-biter. Instead, offer a firm verbal reprimand (in a low growling tone of voice while making direct eye contact) followed by encouragement to chew on a proper chew toy.
- To be most effective, the reprimand must be given during or immediately after the misbehavior, and every time it occurs.