

Pawsitive Results Critter Academy

Where people learn to lead...and pets love to follow!

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Controlling Chewing

Why Dogs Chew

As carnivores, chewing is an instinctual and important part of the upkeep of every dog's teeth and jaws. Dogs also explore and interact with their world with their mouths (look, ma, no hands! ... What's a dog to do?!). Puppies are especially avid chewers- they want to explore everything! Plus, puppies are getting their teeth in and chewing aids in the teething process. Chewing is not a behavior that should be eliminated from a dog's life; chewing needs to be managed and directed onto appropriate objects so everyone can live together happily.

Manage That Mouth!

Preventing your dog from chewing on inappropriate objects is an important step in the training process. If chewing mistakes happen repeatedly, your dog will develop preferences for those objects, making the training process more difficult than it needs to be.

- ◆ If you don't want it in your dog's mouth, then keep it out of his reach, especially when he is unsupervised!
- ◆ Don't confuse your dog by offering him shoes and socks as toys and then getting upset with him for chewing on yours.
- ◆ Confine your dog when you cannot supervise him. Crate train him and/or set up a "puppy-proofed" confinement area with plenty of acceptable chews and no off-limits items.
- ◆ Give your dog plenty of people-time. If he is bored and lonely, he is more likely to chew excessively. Plus, you need to supervise his chewing habits if you want to help him develop good ones or if you want to change bad ones.
- ◆ Have realistic expectations. You are pretty much guaranteed to lose something of value when you bring a puppy or new dog into your family. It takes time for dogs to learn house rules; help him get it right by preventing bad habits from developing!

Make the Right Behavior Easy

If you provide interesting toys and adequate exercise, and make the right behavior the most rewarding, then your dog will be happy to limit his chewing to his own toys!

- ◆ Make a list of the off-limits items that your dog chews on. Your dog is telling you what materials and textures he is attracted to- provide chews that meet those needs! If your dog chews on furniture legs, then offer him hard-textured nylabones. If your dog goes for pillows and the edges of rugs, provide him with stuffed toys.
- ◆ Don't try to prevent your dog from ripping up his stuffed toys; just be sure he isn't ingesting them. This is a normal behavior, and his toys are an appropriate outlet for it.
- ◆ Feed your dog out of treat-dispensing toys. Working for his food will provide your dog with mental stimulation and physical exercise. Plus, if he is busy working on his food toy, he won't be chewing on your shoe!
- ◆ Catch your dog getting it right! Reward your dog with praise, petting, treats, and play sessions for choosing his own toys to chew on. Your dog should always get more attention for getting it right than for making mistakes.
- ◆ If you catch your dog chewing on something he shouldn't, calmly remove the item and replace it with an acceptable chew toy. Put the item where your dog cannot get to it again. If he continues to chew on the toy you gave him, give him positive feedback.
- ◆ Make your dog's preferred off-limits chew items unattractive. There are many anti-chew products on the market. You can also try covering items with heavy plastic, aluminum foil, or hot sauce.
- Make sure your dog is getting plenty of exercise every day. The average dog can easily run 1-3 miles every day. If you aren't able to provide your dog with adequate exercise, consider hiring a dog walker or enrolling your dog in a good doggie daycare.

Avoid Punishment

Remember that chewing is a normal dog behavior- your dog will never see chewing as wrong. In fact, we often send the wrong message when we attempt to punish our dogs.

- ◆ If you catch him in the act of chewing something and punish him for it, he will learn not to chew in front of you. Then you will lose the opportunity to redirect his chewing onto appropriate items and give him positive feedback for chewing on those items.
- ◆ If you discover a chewed item and try to punish your dog even minutes after the fact, you will only confuse him. Dogs cannot look back into the past and relate current events to past actions. When you punish your dog, you are punishing him for the last thing that happened. For example, if you call your dog to you to punish him for chewing your shoe, you are actually punishing him for approaching you.
- ◆ Dogs are very good at learning simple patterns. While they often do not know what they are being punished for, it is easy for them to realize that punishment only occurs in your presence. That certainly doesn't encourage a trusting relationship!
- ◆ Don't be fooled into thinking that your dog understands why he is in trouble because he "looks guilty". In reality, your dog is offering you submissive gestures meant to "turn off" your aggression. Either your body posture, facial expression, tone of voice, or past experience is letting your dog know that this situation means "bad things for dogs".