

How to Manage Destructive Chewing



Call the 'Adopters Only' Hotline at 942-7297 or visit www.hawaiianhumane.org for more advice & Information.

Exploring the world with their mouths is normal behavior for dogs. Chewing can, however, be directed to appropriate items so your dog doesn't destroy items you value.

Take Control By Managing The Situation

- ❖ 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 television remote controls out of your dog's reach.
- ❖ Don't confuse your dog by offering him shoes and socks as toys and then expect him to distinguish between his shoe and yours.
- ❖ Until he learns the house rules, confine him when you're unable to keep an eye on him. Choose a safe place that is dog-proof, with fresh water and safe toys. If your dog is crate trained, you may also crate him 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 him alternatives to inappropriate behavior and he can't learn these when he's in the yard by himself.
- ❖ If, and only if, you catch your dog chewing on something he shouldn't, interrupt the behavior with a loud noise, offer him an acceptable chew toy instead, and praise him lavishly when he takes the toy in his mouth.
- ❖ Have realistic expectations. It's almost inevitable that your dog will 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 this out of his reach.

Chewing is normal teething and investigative behavior for puppies, and enjoyable for many adult dogs. Dogs that engage in destructive chewing do so for a variety of reasons. In order to deal with the behavior, you must first determine why your dog is being destructive.

Play, Boredom, Or Social Isolation

Normal play behavior can result in destruction, as it may involve digging, chewing, shredding, or shaking toy-like objects. Since dogs investigate objects by pawing at them and exploring them with their mouths, they may also inadvertently damage items in their environment. Your dog may be chewing for entertainment if:

- ❖ He's left alone for long periods without opportunities for interaction.
- ❖ His environment is barren, without playmates or interesting toys.
- ❖ He's less than three years old and doesn't have other outlets for his energy.
- ❖ He's a type of dog, like a herding or sporting breed, that needs an active lifestyle.

Solutions

- ❖ Play with your dog daily in a safe, fenced-in area. Fetch is a great game that will use up your dog's excess energy without tiring you!
- ❖ Go for a walk. Walks should be more than just "bathroom time." On-leash walks are important opportunities for you and your dog to be together. Don't forget to allow time for sniffing, exploring, instruction and praise.
- ❖ Increase your dog's mental stimulation. Teach your dog commands or tricks and practice them daily or take an obedience class.
- ❖ Provide your dog with lots of toys.
- ❖ Rotate your dog's toys to refresh his interest in them. "New" toys are always more interesting than old ones.
- ❖ Try different kinds of toys, but when you introduce a new toy, watch your dog to make sure he won't tear it up and swallow the pieces.
- ❖ Consider a toy that can be stuffed with food. Putting tidbits of food inside Kong-type toys will focus your dog's chewing activities on these toys instead of on unacceptable objects.

- ❖ Make your dog's favorite off-limits chew objects unattractive to him by covering them with heavy plastic, aluminum foil, or a commercial anti-chew product.
- ❖ You might want to consider a good doggie day care program for two or three days a week to work off some of your dog's excess energy.

Separation Anxiety

Dogs with separation anxiety tend to display behaviors that reflect a strong attachment to their owners. This includes following you from room to room, frantic greetings, and reacting anxiously to your preparation to leave the house. Such dogs might chew anything from furniture to window or door frames, or may tear window screens. These behaviors are not motivated by spite or revenge.

Factors that can precipitate a separation anxiety problem:

- ❖ A change in the family's schedule that results in your dog being left alone more often.
- ❖ A move to a new house.
- ❖ The death or loss of a family member or another family pet.
- ❖ A period at a shelter or boarding kennel.

Punishment will only worsen the problem. Separation anxiety can be resolved by using counter conditioning and desensitization techniques. If you suspect this is the problem, please call us or visit our Web site for more information.

Attention-Seeking Behavior

Without realizing it, we often pay more attention to our dogs when they're misbehaving. Dogs who don't receive a lot of attention and reinforcement for calm behavior may be destructive when they want attention.

Solutions

- ❖ Make sure your dog gets a lot of positive attention every day – playing, walking, grooming or just petting.
- ❖ Ignore (as much as possible) bad behavior and reward good behavior. Remember to reward your dog with praise and petting when he's playing quietly with appropriate toys.
- ❖ Make his favorite off-limits chew objects unattractive or unavailable to him. Use aversives

(such as aluminum foil) on objects that cannot be put away.

- ❖ Teach your dog a "drop it" command so when he does pick up objects that are off-limits object, you can use your command and praise him for complying.
- ❖ Have your dog perform a command ("sit" or "down" for example) before giving him any privilege such as play time, a walk, or a food treat. This gets your dog in the habit of complying with your commands and is a good way to make sure he gets lots of positive attention for doing the right things.



Fears And Phobias

Your dog's destructive behavior may be fear.

Solutions

- ❖ Provide a safe place for your dog. Observe where he likes to go when he's anxious, then allow access to that space or create a similar one for him to use when the fear stimulus is present.
- ❖ Don't comfort your dog when he's behaving fearfully. Try to get him to play with you or respond to commands he knows and give him praise and treats when he responds to you instead of to the fear stimulus.
- ❖ Don't crate your dog unless he's been crate-trained and considers the crate his safe place.

What Not To Do

Punishment is rarely effective in resolving destructive behavior problems and can even make them worse. Never discipline your dog after the fact. If you discover an item your dog has chewed minutes, or even seconds before, it's too late to administer a correction.

People often believe their dog makes this connection because he runs and hides or "looks guilty." Dogs don't feel guilt, rather they display submissive postures like cowering, running away or hiding, when they feel threatened by an angry tone of voice, body posture or facial expression.

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