

# Chewing on Stuff

Chewing is a great hobby. To your pup, the entire world is a chew toy. It is our job to teach chewing discrimination. Dogs throw themselves into chewing like we do when we are watching a good football game. You're lucky your dog likes to chew. You can use chewing appropriate items as a substitute behaviour for other undesirable behaviours.

## WHY DOGS CHEW

- Teething puppies try to relieve pain.
- Puppies chew to explore their environment, just like babies putting everything in their mouths. Chewing can become a lifelong habit that is very pleasurable for the dog.
- The repetitious motion of chewing can be soothing to an anxious dog.
- Chewing helps remove plaque, and it's good for the health of your dog's teeth and gums, especially if you are feeding soft food. Chewing can help sweeten his breath.
- The dog is bored. Recreational chewing helps your dog release excess energy.
- Chewing an item that the dog has learned will get a reaction out of the owner is a way to get attention.



The dog is not chewing your good things because he is angry with you or getting even with you. Dogs just don't operate that way. Chewing the wrong objects such as electric cords or wood covered in lead paint can be frustrating for you and dangerous or fatal for the dog. Choking, intestinal blockage, and poisoning from ingesting medicine or cleaning goods can occur. Even chocolate is bad for dogs. While you are teaching your dog to chew only approved items, make sure none of these chew hazards are within reach.

Bored dogs often chew for something to do.  
Give them something better to chew, or something better to do!

Consider using a wire crate to safely confine your dog for short periods when you can't supervise. Keep your dog on a long line when you're home. Some owners tie the line to their belt. Others attach a bell to the line so the pup makes noise and is easier to keep track of. If you use a leash, attach it to your pup's harness, not the collar, for safety and to avoid neck injuries.

Both puppies and older dogs should have lots of safe doggy chew toys. Give a teething pup something cool and hard to help him get rid of his little puppy teeth. Twist some clean pieces of old toweling, soak them in water and freeze them into interesting shapes. Rawhide chew bones can be soaked and frozen as well. Give your pup one of these when he seems to be in a chewing mood. The coldness will soothe his swollen gums. Thin vinyl toys with squeakers might be okay for games with you, but if left alone, the dog could chew it up in no time and perhaps choke.

Beware of toys that are small enough to become lodged in the dog's throat. Kongs™, Nylabones™ and other toys are designed to be stuffed or smeared with food. This is better than your shoe. Build interest in the stuffed pacifier by teasing your puppy with it. Stuff it, but don't give it to the dog at first. Admire it; put it up on the counter. Pick it up and add something really good, like a tiny cube of cheese or a smear of peanut butter. Smell it, pretend to eat it, and finally give it over. You may want two or three of these wonderful toys. They

can be washed with a bottle brush and soapy water. You can even place them in a dishwasher or clothes washer. Have enough chew toys that you can rotate them, putting down "new" ones every day. Be very careful with real raw bones, as they can cause obstructions, and stay away from cooked bones. Be very careful with rawhide chews. Some dogs will eat too much. When it expands in their stomach, they become distressed. Tennis balls can be a problem too. Some dogs are experts at peeling the covering, and then choking on it. Other dogs have been known to swallow them.

Are you paying attention to the behaviour you want? If the dog is good, do you ignore her? If she starts chewing, does she get the family's attention: "*Tippy, no! Bad girl. Stop it!*" Anticipate a chewing problem. As a puppy, get the dog "hooked" on appropriate chew toys. Help your pup to learn to discriminate.

### **CHEWING THINGS WHILE YOU'RE AWAY?**

Ask your instructor for specific information on home alone management and home life enrichment. There are preparations available at pet shops that can be used as a taste deterrent. A bit of special food in or on the appropriate toys and bitter apple on the inappropriate items may help teach the puppy what tastes good and what doesn't taste good. Always try to keep grey areas out of dog training. While training your dog not to chew, you may need to restrict the area in which he lives. Make it dog proof; always provide good chew toys.

### **GOOD TOY/BAD TOY GAME FOR 7-16 WEEK-OLD PUPPIES**

**Step One:** Have three legal puppy toys spread out on the floor and an illegal object (your shoe, book, child's toy). If the pup investigates a legal toy, praise him and immediately have a play or retrieve session with him and his toy. If he investigates an illegal object, ignore him. Encourage him to find a legal toy. Puppy proof the floor again when the game is over.

**Step Two:** Continue the "Good Toy/Bad Toy" exercise, but make the legal toys even better by putting a tiny smear of peanut butter on them. Make the bad toys even worse by putting a taste deterrent on them. The deterrent can save other un-chewables such as your furniture, shoe strings, or your good leather leash. And the best part is the "correction" doesn't come from you, so it's apt to carry over when you're not home!

### **MOUTHING – WHAT IF YOU ARE THE CHEW TOY?**

The pup's mother and littermates have done much to teach bite inhibition by immediate correction when the pup bit too hard in play. Some pups understand if you say, "Ouch" and abruptly stop playing. The idea is to convey that you don't want to play with him anymore. Turn your head away and tuck your hands under your crossed arms. As soon as the puppy desists from the mouthing for a few seconds, play with him again. Repeat as necessary, until the puppy understands the message that you are trying to communicate. ■