

How to Curb Destructive Chewing - Adult Dogs

(This document is for older puppies and adult dogs. If you have a puppy younger than 6 months in age, please refer to our Puppy document.)

Dogs interact with the world with their mouths. Using their mouths is how they eat, play, explore, pick things up, etc. Not only is chewing natural for dogs, but it has health benefits as well (so long as they're chewing the right things). Here is how to teach your dog what they can and cannot chew.

I. Exercise.

There is an adage that "a tired dog is a good dog". Sometimes a dog chews for no other reason than they are bored. It's important to make sure your dog has plenty of physical stimulation as well as mental stimulation. Mental stimulation can include training games, puzzle toys, even a Kong stuffed with either treats or their meal. A dog can run around the yard for an hour and still have stores of energy (or at least enough for chewing!), but put that same dog in front of a puzzle toy that takes them fifteen minutes and suddenly you have one pooped pup! Check [this link for ideas on canine enrichment puzzle toys](#).

II. Management.

Training *only* works if you catch your dog in the act of chewing something they shouldn't. If your dog primarily chews on things when you are away or not paying attention, you need to address this behavior by managing their environment.

Your dog can't chew on what it can't reach. Keep shoes, kids toys, remotes, and other curious and chewable items out of your dog's reach. If you need to cook dinner, make a phone call, or get involved in some other task that takes your attention away from your dog, have a dog-proof area. This can be a penned-off area or even the dog's crate. It's not a punishment, so make sure your dog has plenty of positive things to keep them occupied. (One of the many benefits of crate training is to prevent destructive behaviors like chewing.)

III. Redirect.

If all we did was prevent and correct, we wouldn't give our dogs a clear message. We need to teach them what they ARE allowed to chew on, not just the don'ts. If you catch your dog chewing on something they shouldn't, interrupt them with a neutral noise that gets their attention (for example, a mild "eh eh" or "no" or a light clap of your hands.) Offer them an appropriate toy or chew as a means of redirecting their chewing. While your dog is in the process of learning these dos and don'ts, offer lots of praise *every time* your dog picks up one of their chew toys.

IV. Teach “Drop/Give”.

If your dog picks up an item of yours, do not chase them to get the item and do not engage in “tug-of-war” with the item. This is just making the “game” all the more fun for your dog. If they won’t exchange for toy (see above), try using treats. Toss a treat (or a couple) on the floor in front of them to exchange for your item. You can start incorporating the word “Drop” or “Give” when they release the item to begin to teach them to drop on command.

V. Don’t punish.

If you discover a chewed item even minutes after they’ve chewed it, it’s already too late to correct your dog. Animals associate punishment with what they’re doing at the time they’re being corrected.

Many people believe their dog understands they’ve been naughty because they “look guilty” when confronted with the object they’ve previously chewed up. In reality, this “guilty look” is a natural submissive look dogs sometimes give when they read our body language and/or tone of voice to be upset/angry. They may understand that we are upset, but likely do not understand why. Scolding or punishment at this point is not only ineffective at correcting the chewing behavior, it can lead to other undesirable behaviors.

VI. Use something with your scent for anxiety-based chewing.

In addition to using chew toys and puzzle feeders, if your dog is chewing up your possessions and you think it’s related to anxiety when you are gone (e.g. your dog always chooses to chew on something personal of yours), try fashioning a chew toy out of something with your scent. For example, use old, unwashed socks or t-shirts (with your scent on them) and make a “rope toy” for your dog. Note: don’t just give your dog an old shoe/sock as your dog is not likely to understand the difference between the shoe you give him and the ones you *don’t* want chewed up.