



Chewing and Destructive Behavior in Dogs

Why Dogs Chew

Chewing is a natural behavior for dogs and is a great way for them to both explore their world and to meet their physical and mental needs. The reasons that we might see destructive behavior in dogs varies widely, though it's important to remember that dogs do not destroy things out of anger or spite. In fact, chewing serves many purposes for dogs, including alleviating boredom, reducing pain in teething puppies, and aiding in stress reduction for fearful, nervous, or anxious dogs. Even though chewing is a very natural and healthy behavior, it can become frustrating for owners and dangerous for dogs if they are chewing things that aren't necessarily meant for them. In any case, generally the reason that dogs chew on things is simply because they don't know any better. Because of this, our primary focus is teaching them what is appropriate and dog safe before unwanted and potentially dangerous chewing habits are created.

Setting Your Dog Up for Success

Think of how you might set up an ideal environment for a toddler in your home. The key to success and safety is heavy environmental management and offering tons of options that are both fun and entertaining to encourage and teach them what is theirs to play with and what is not.

Always monitoring, keeping items that might not be safe up and out of reach, and providing them with several safe and appropriate options allows them to explore the environment, practice chewing on items that are intended for them, and prevents them from practicing chewing things that might not be safe of dog appropriate.

Training Guide

- **Dog proof your home:** Create dog-safe zones in the areas where your dog is going to be spending their time. To do this, put anything you might not want them to get into up and out of reach. Things that dog generally find interesting are trash cans, remotes, socks or shoes, and children's toys or stuffed animals.
- **Put valuables away:** Close doors to rooms with valuables or things that you might find important to reduce the likelihood of any accidental loses or frustrations while you're training.
- **Provide a large variety of chewing options:** The key here is ensuring that when your dog does have the urge to chew, they have a number of fun and interesting options readily available to them. The more we can teach them what they should chew on, the less likely they are to feel the need to go find something that we didn't intend them to have. Because dogs chew for a variety of reasons, we want to make sure that we have a wide selection of different items, ranging from soft toys to durable bones. For example, a dog that is bored might want to chew something soft and fluffy, whereas a puppy who is teething might need something a little bit tougher to help elevate pain from incoming teeth. Some common favorites are:

- Benbone Bacon Flavored Chew Toy
 - HuggleHounds Barnyard Plush
 - Kong Flyer Dog Frisbee Toy
 - JW Pet Hol-ee
 - Frisco Squeaking Alligator
- **Provide mental enrichment:** Encouraging dogs to eat their meals and snacks out of puzzle toys is a great way to direct that chewing and exploring onto something that not only provides them with an outlet for the chewing and licking, but simultaneously reinforces them for engaging with those items while they play. Some great options are:
 - Kong toy stuffed with peanut butter and frozen
 - Kong Wobbler
 - Paw5 Snuffle Mat
- **Redirect, when needed:** If you do find your dog has something that they shouldn't have, very calmly redirect them to something else. Avoid making a fuss, punishing, moving quickly towards the object, or chasing as that can be very exciting to dogs and can easily become a game. Instead, redirect them by grabbing and getting excited about another toy. Reward with play and praise when they engage with that toy. Remove the item they grabbed and try to match it in terms of size and material (I.e. a stuffed toy if they were grabbing a sock) in the future.
- **Manage when you can't supervise:** Some dogs easily become bored or slightly anxious when left alone and might be more likely to explore during that time. In order to ensure they are set up for success, utilize a crate or closed off area with plenty of chew options when you cannot actively supervise.
- **Additional tips and things to consider:**
 - Rotate toys every few days to prevent them from becoming bored with any one toy.
 - Pay attention to what toys keep your dog engaged and continue to offer those regularly.
 - Inspect chew options daily for damage or missing pieces. Discard any badly damaged toys as they can present a choking hazard.
 - No-hides or other edible chews should always be appropriately sized and only given when the dog can be supervised. Pieces can be easily chewed off and become a choking hazard.
 - Always praise your dog for chewing appropriate items.
 - Never give your puppy or dog leftover bones from cooking. They can splinter and cause serious injuries to your puppy or dog.
 - Remember that chewing is a natural, healthy behavior for dogs, and they do not chew items out of anger or spite. It's important you manage the environment so the dog cannot access items they shouldn't have and redirect them to more appropriate items if they are chewing something you find to be unideal. Punishment should never be used to modify these behaviors as it can create or increase fear, stress, and anxiety, which can result in fear, anxiety, and/or aggression.

When and How to Get Help

While chewing is a natural behavior for puppies and dogs, there are certain situations that may indicate there is a more serious underlying issue. For example, dogs with separation anxiety may chew in an attempt to escape or to relieve extreme anxiety. These dogs may chew or dig at carpet or molding around exit points, such as windows or doors or bite at bars of crates or confinement areas. If your dog is showing major signs of destruction that is not resolved by the above recommendations or if you are concerned that your dogs' chewing is excessive or dangerous, you should consult with a Board-Certified Veterinary Behaviorist or a Certified Professional Dog Trainer so they can evaluate your situation and get you a plan that is appropriate for you and your pet.

The two main organizations where you can search a database to find certified trainers near you is the Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers or the International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants. If you are seeing more severe signs of distress listed above and are looking for a Board-Certified Veterinary Behaviorist, you should search the American College of Veterinary Behaviorists website to search for the closest behaviorist near you.