



# Puppy Chewing

Puppies, similar to human infants and toddlers, explore their world by putting things in their mouths. In addition, puppies are teething until they're about 6 months old, which usually causes them some discomfort. Chewing not only facilitates teething, but also makes sore gums feel better. While it is perfectly normal for puppies to chew on furniture, shoes, and shrubbery, these behaviors can be a problem for their humans. A puppy may not magically outgrow these behaviors as he matures. Instead, you must shape your puppy's behavior and teach him which objects are acceptable chew toys and which are not. As they learn the new rules, you may need to manage the environment to ensure they don't have access to the items that should not be chewed.

## Management

It is virtually inevitable that your puppy will, at some point, chew up something you value. This is part of raising a puppy! You can, however, prevent most problems by taking the following precautions:

- Minimize chewing problems by puppy-proofing your house. Put the trash out of reach inside a cabinet or outside on a porch, or buy containers with locking lids. Encourage children to pick up their toys and don't leave socks, shoes, eyeglasses, briefcases, cell phones, or TV remote controls lying around within your puppy's reach.
- If you actually catch your puppy chewing on something he shouldn't, interrupt the behavior, then offer him an acceptable chew toy instead. Praise him when he takes the toy in his mouth.
- Make unacceptable chew items unpleasant to your puppy. Furniture and other items can be sprayed with Bitter Apple or other taste aversive to make them unappealing. Keep in mind this doesn't always work for all dogs, so management is key!
- Don't give your puppy objects to play with that can cause confusion, such as old socks, old shoes, or old children's toys that closely resemble items that are off limits. He cannot tell the difference!
- Closely supervise your puppy. Don't give him the chance to go off by himself and get into trouble. Use baby gates, close doors, or tether him to you with a six-foot leash so you can keep an eye on him.
- When you must be gone from the house, confine your puppy to a small, safe area, such as a laundry room. You may also begin to crate train your puppy. Puppies under 5 months of age should not be crated for longer than four hours at a time, as they may not be able to control their bladder and bowels longer than that.

- Make sure your puppy is getting adequate physical activity. Puppies left alone in a yard do not play by themselves. Take your puppy for walks and/or play a game of fetch with him as often as possible.
- Give your puppy plenty of people time. He can only learn the rules of your house when he is in the house with you.
- Take your puppy to a training class to teach him important cues, like “leave it.” Puppy training also plays a key role in their socialization.

### **Encouraging Acceptable Behavior**

- Provide your puppy with lots of appropriate toys.
- Rotate your puppy’s toys! Puppies, like babies, are often more interested in unfamiliar or novel objects. Put out four or five toys for a few days, then pick those up and put out four or five different ones. Rotate often.
- Experiment with different kinds of toys to find your pup’s favorites. When you introduce a new toy to your puppy, watch him to make sure he won’t tear it up and ingest the pieces.
- Consider the various types of toys that can be stuffed with food. Putting tidbits of food inside chew toys focuses your puppy’s chewing activities on those toys instead of on unacceptable objects.
- If your puppy is teething, try freezing a wet washcloth for him to chew on.

### **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 even just a few minutes later, it is too late to administer a correction. Your dog doesn’t understand “I chewed those shoes an hour ago and that’s why I’m being scolded now.” People often believe their dog makes this connection because he runs and hides or looks “guilty,” but dogs don’t feel guilt. Rather, they display submissive body language like cowering, running away, or hiding when they feel threatened by an angry tone of voice, body posture or facial expression. Your dog doesn’t know that he’s done something wrong; he only knows that you’re upset. Punishment after the fact will not only fail to eliminate the undesirable behavior, but may also provoke other undesirable behaviors or hurt your relationship with your dog.

### **Other Reasons for Destructive Behavior**

Although most destructive chewing by puppies is normal behavior, some puppies may exhibit destructive behavior for the same reasons as adult dogs. Examples include separation anxiety, fear-related behaviors and attention-getting behavior. For help with these problems, contact the Animal Behavior Manager at Homeward Pet Adoption Center or consult another professional trainer or behavior consultant.