

# Destructive Chewing

As humans, we often see chewing as a problem that needs to be fixed, or as something that dogs do to get back at us for something. And it's understandable: inappropriate chewing can be frustrating and expensive to us. But all dogs use their mouths to explore and entertain themselves, and they don't think of chewing as sending us a message.

The solution lies in teaching them what's acceptable and providing them with plenty of outlets for this behavior, along with enough exercise and time with you to prevent boredom and frustration. Meanwhile, it's up to us to keep them from making mistakes - especially mistakes that involve the things we value most, like our furniture!

## Managing the Situation

Until your dog knows what to chew and what not to chew, you have to make it impossible for them to make mistakes.

- Make sure the things you love that your dog might find appealing are safe: put your shoes, clothing, remote controls, kids' toys, and so on where your dog can't get to them.
- Be consistent in what you allow your dog to chew. Old socks aren't much different from new socks to your dog, so don't confuse the issue by offering them any socks at all!
- Remember that your dog can't learn what you want when you're not there to teach them, so make sure that your dog doesn't have access to things you don't want chewed when you're not there. Set your dog up with plenty of appropriate things to chew and safe interactive toys while you're gone or put your dog in a crate or dog-proof area where they cannot access things that you don't want them chewing on.
- Tire your dog out before you leave them alone. If your dog's needs for exercise and mental stimulation aren't being met, destructive behavior, including chewing, is likely to be the result.

## Teaching Your Dog What to Chew Instead

While dogs have preferences about what they like to chew, you can help them learn what you want by making safe, appropriate chew toys appealing.

- Provide plenty of safe alternatives for your dog: hollow sterilized bones and strong rubber toys, such as Kongs, can be stuffed with food to make them enticing.
- You can feed your dog some or all of their meals in interactive toys like Kongs, Buster Cubes, or Busy Buddy toys.
- Praise your dog and give them lots of happy attention when they chew on the things you want them to.
- When your dog puts their mouth on something inappropriate, trade it for an approved toy. Praise them happily when they take it. Consider giving your dog something of a similar texture. For example, if your dog is chewing on wood or hard plastic, trade for a hard bone; if your dog is chewing on a shoe, trade them for a soft rubber toy; if your dog is chewing on clothing, or children's stuffed toys, provide your dog with soft or plush toys.

It will take time for your dog to learn the house rules, so keep your expectations realistic. If your management isn't perfect and your dog makes a mistake, just take it as a lesson learned and move on.

## What Doesn't Work

Your dog can learn only what you're there to teach in the moment. Punishing your dog for destruction that happened while you were gone, or even a minute ago while you weren't looking, won't help your dog learn what you want. Dogs need feedback for their behavior while they're engaged in that behavior - or within three seconds of the behavior - in order to learn what you do or don't want them to do.