

# It's A Dog's World™

## K - 9 A C A D E M Y

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### CHEWING & PLAYBITING

Chewing, ripping, shredding, tearing up and generally destroying stuff are as normal for dogs as tail-wagging. If you have a dog, expect chewing. Provide him with his own toys and teach him to use them or he will destructively chew anything available, such as your furniture, carpet, clothing or shoes.



Dogs do not chew and destroy your house and belongings because they are angry, jealous or spiteful. They do it as a way of not only exploring their world, but also as part of the teething process, as a way to expend excess energy or as a way to alleviate boredom.

#### Teething

Puppies will normally start teething around 4 months of age. At that time, you may see an increase in their chewing behavior. It is very important that you have plenty of appropriate items available for your puppy to chew on. Just like teething human babies, puppy gums will become sore and irritated when they are cutting their adult teeth. During this time, it is not uncommon to find your puppy's baby teeth on the floor, however, in most cases; your puppy will usually swallow their baby teeth. As your puppy matures, his need for chewing may decrease but it will never completely go away.

#### Stress & Boredom

Some dogs will continue to chew because they may be lonely, bored, frustrated or anxious. Active dogs can become restless when left alone for long periods. If you always come home at a certain time and you are late, your dog may become anxious. The dogs' chewing is a form of occupational therapy to relieve stress and release energy. If you come home and find that your dog has destroyed something, **do not punish the dog!**

Be sure to provide plenty of exercise for your dog, especially if you are going to confine them. Chewing helps your dog eliminate pent-up energy, so if your dog has gone for a good long walk or played a rousing game of "fetch" before you leave, your dog will be less likely to be destructive.

#### Chew Toys

Provide your dog with a wide variety of toys and make sure they are available in the area where your dog is confined. Since he will have no other choice of things to chew, he will learn to chew and play with his own toys. Some good types of toys for your dog are Kongs®, Nylabones®, rope toys, etc. Be sure that any toys you leave for your dog cannot be splintered or chewed into small pieces that could cause your dog to choke. Toys that can be stuffed with food treats, like Kongs® or Buster Cubes® will keep your dog's interest for long periods of time. You can extend the entertainment value of your dog's toy and sooth your puppy's gums at the same time by placing their chew toy in the freezer. Try stuffing a Kong with peanut butter and freezing it overnight. Your dog will be entertained for hours trying to extricate the treats from the toy and the cold toy will ease his gum irritation.

Avoid rawhide toys because certain types of rawhide will not dissolve in the dog's digestive track and can cause impactions. Similarly, bones are not necessarily a good choice. If your dog is a constant chewer, allowing them to chew on hard items like bones or cow hooves can cause excessive wear on your dog's teeth. Items like steak or pork chop bones, as well as poultry bones can splinter and perforate your dog's stomach or intestines. If you must give your dog bones, try knuckle, marrow or femur bones which are available in raw form from your butcher or in the meat department of your grocery store. Pet stores will carry treated and basted bones for your dog. If you choose to give your dog a raw bone, be sure to discard the bone as soon as your dog stops chewing on it in order to prevent your dog from ingesting harmful bacteria that can develop on the uncooked bone.

Never give your dog an item made of anything that you do not want him or her to chew on. For example, if you do not want chewed shoes, never give your dog an old shoe to play with. By allowing the dog to chew on an old shoe they get the idea that all shoes are fair game. Until your dog can be trusted not to destroy your home and yard, do not give him free, unsupervised run of your house. Give him a pleasant area or room of his own where he can enjoy himself and relax when you are not home or are unable to supervise him. Dog runs, crates, kennels or "puppy-proofed" rooms are excellent for this purpose.

When you are home, take time to teach your dog to play with her toys and to seek them out whenever she feels like chewing. Always lavish your dog with praise every time you see her playing with or chewing on one of her toys. Teach your dog to "find" her toys. Scatter several toys in different rooms throughout the house. Tell her to "find it," then immediately lead her from room to room encouraging her to pick up a toy when she sees one. When she does so, reward with praise, affection, play and even a food treat, and then continue the game.



### **Chewing Deterrents**

If you catch your dog in the act of chewing a forbidden item, you can interrupt her with a verbal correction. Immediately direct your dog to one of her own toys and praise her for chewing it. This will teach your dog not to chew forbidden items when you are present, but it probably will not discourage the dog from investigating these items when you are not there. The only way to prevent your dog from chewing these things is to make them inherently unattractive. There are many products in pet stores that are designed to apply to furniture, etc that are safe but repulsive to dogs. Some effective taste deterrents are *Bitter Apple®*, *McNasty Anti-Chew®*, *Vicks Vapo-Rub®*, anything with mint, eucalyptus, citronella or camphor oils or even whiskey. Why chew on something that is boring, distasteful or unpleasant when there are plenty of fun, exciting and tasty things to chew on?

By far the simplest way to keep your dog from chewing on forbidden items is to prevent access to them. Put your shoes in the closet and shut the door. Place the trash outside. Keep doors closed; keep valuables out of reach. Praise and reward your dog profusely for chewing her own toys.

### **PLAYBITING**

Just like chewing, play biting is also a very normal part of puppyhood. This is not a sign of aggression, but is just the way that puppies learn how to play. Fortunately, most biting done by puppies is playful and as your puppy gets older, much of its nipping and mouthing will disappear, particularly if you don't encourage it. Dogs must be taught by you that it is inappropriate for them to put their mouths on you.

To discourage play biting, avoid aggressive play such as “face-slapping”, “boxing”, tug of war and wrestling with your puppy. This type of play causes your dog to become overly excited and difficult to manage. Teach children not to reach over the dog’s head when playing, as this may trigger the dog to bite the child on the underside of the arm. Instead, encourage your children to pet the dog on the chest and under the chin where it is harder for the dog to grab on to little fingers.

As with chewing behavior, it is important to redirect your dog to appropriate toys anytime it starts to chew on your hands or feet. If your dog really starts to chew or nip on your hands, try waving a toy to distract your dog. Be sure to praise your dog for showing interest in the toy.

You can also try putting your hands behind your back or keeping your fingers curled because most dogs won’t bite a closed hand. If you ever watch puppies playing, you will see that it is very common for them to bite each other. However, when the play gets too rough, the puppy being bitten will give a high-pitched, piercing squeal and then usually get up and ignore the puppy that did the biting. This method also works when you do it. The next time your dog bites you, let out a loud “yelp”, then get up and walk away. Completely ignore your puppy for several minutes...don’t talk, touch or look at your dog. In most cases, your dog will be startled when you yelp and will stop biting. He will also quickly learn that biting leads to the loss of his playmate.

Frequently, dogs, especially puppies, will grab onto your pant legs or shoelaces when you are trying to walk. This is form of attention seeking behavior and should not be encouraged. In addition to distracting your dog by getting them interested in one of their toys, you may need to resort to using mild corrections, such as a firm, “No!” combined with redirection to a toy. A quick squirt of water to the back of the dog’s head from a water bottle or squirt gun is also very effective in interrupting the unwanted playbiting. Be sure that anytime you use a correction, that you redirect the dog to an acceptable chew item, and then praise them for stopping the unwanted behavior

Occasionally, puppies may work themselves into a “frenzy” of playbiting and just won’t stop biting, no matter what you try. This is usually a sign that your puppy needs a “Time-out” to encourage it to settle down. If your puppy has reached this stage, calmly pick up your puppy and place him and a toy in his crate or puppy-proofed area. In most cases, your puppy will probably curl up and quickly go to sleep.

Playbiting and destructive chewing can be a frustrating part of your dog’s early behaviors, however through consistency and patience on your part, combined with appropriate levels of structured exercise, your dog should quickly learn what behaviors are acceptable to you.