



UNWANTED CHEWING BEHAVIOR ... AND HOW TO MANAGE IT In Both Puppies & Adult Dogs

Many dogs love to chew ! No surprise there. But we never seem to mind a dog chewing until ... well, until they destroy something of value to us. Fortunately, there are several strategies that we can put into place to help control a dog's unwanted chewing behavior.

WHY DOGS CHEW

The sense of taste is well-developed even in newborn pups. While we understand a puppy's need to chew, few people realize that a dog's mouth is similar to the human hand as a means of exploring their environment. And it's really not different from infant children routinely putting things in their mouth (pens, car keys, etc) as a means to explore the world around them. Of course, some puppies are more "oral" than others. In particular, Retrievers (Labradors, Golden Retrievers, etc) typically enjoy chewing for life ! Of course, if you have (or have had) a Retriever, you already know this.

In excitable and extremely nervous types of puppies, minor stress may produce anxiety that may lead to destructive chewing. Some of the causes for excessive anxiety in pups include:

- Emotional departures by the owners (separation anxiety)
- Excessive attention to the pup
- Social isolation
- Delayed feeding
- Monotony or boredom
- Owners giving treats inconsistently

When 2 or more pups live together, chewing may result from competition for articles.

Chewing appears to be an enjoyable experience for nearly all pups and many older dogs. So the element of fun may also contribute to chewing problems. The best approach to destructive chewing involves prevention ... and then guiding them to chewable articles, such as a ball or bone or Kong-type toy. This helps a pup distinguish between chewable and non-chewable items. All too often, we engage in activities that actually encourage a puppy to chew. Activities that encourage a 'mouth-oriented' puppy include:

- Playing tug o' war
- Allowing personal belongings (socks, shoes, etc) to be chewed
- Excessive attention to a puppy's mouth during teething (between 4 to 5 months of age)

So hopefully the message here is clear: you definitely should try to avoid these 3 activities or practices if your pup is chewing excessively !

The 2 MOST COMMON MISTAKES DOG OWNERS MAKE REGARDING THEIR PET'S CHEWING

The most common mistake we see many new puppy owners make is providing a puppy too many chew toys, bones, etc, at a time. The hope is that if the puppy has so many chew toys to keep it busy, then he/she won't chew on the rugs, shoes, pillows, electric cords, etc. Unfortunately, by making available too many items to chew on, the puppy will not be able to distinguish between what is OK and what is not OK to chew on.

Therefore, we recommend providing puppies with no more than 3 items to chew on at a time. But make sure that the 2 or 3 "chewies" are things that the puppy likes to chew on, otherwise it will seek something else to chew. If the puppy doesn't seem to enjoy the toys you give it, then try some other chew toy.

One of our favorite type of chew toys is the "Kong" product line. They are made in such a way that your dog can be rewarded with a treat when it plays with a Kong. With an extensive product line, these make excellent chew toys for all pets, even the most destructive chewers.

The second most common mistake that dog owners make involving their pet's chewing is **mistakenly believing that their dog's chewing is out of spite or revenge**: "Sparky's mad at me for (fill in the excuse: leaving him by himself ... for not giving him a treat ... for making him have to go pee in the rain ... for ... whatever excuse we can think of), and he's getting even with me by chewing on the rug !"

Clearly, we've already established that there are multiple reasons why dogs chew, but chewing out of spite or revenge is not one of them !

OK, I UNDERSTAND ALL THAT NOW ... JUST TELL ME HOW I CAN STOP THIS CHEWING !

Let's be clear about this: We cannot expect to prevent all chewing. It's just the nature of some dogs to chew ! But preventing unwanted chewing should be our goal. Here are some simple ideas:

- 1) We've already mentioned limiting the number of toys available at any given time.
- 2) Also, giving a Kong or a chewie that will encourage your dog to chew on something we want them chew on
- 3) An obvious means of managing the problem is to puppy-proof your house ! Prevent access to the things we do not want them to chew on. If you leave your nice shoes out where your puppy can reach them, and then you leave the house all day, can we blame the dog if he/she chews up our shoes ??? Sorry. Shame on us ... not your dog !
- 4) Confine your dog using a crate or putting up baby gates between rooms, or leave your pet in a pen outdoors.
- 5) Provide lots of exercise and activity
- 6) When you are house/toilet training your puppy, offer a favorite chewy toy immediately after he/she goes to the bathroom. This serves as additional reinforcement after giving verbal praise for proper housetraining, and it also associate a specific chew toy with chewing behavior.
- 7) For household items, you can try to apply something with a foul taste to discourage the chewing. Try Bitter Apple (or Orange), oil of citronella, or Listerine. Repeated use of one of these products should sufficiently 'train' your pup to avoided treated items.

WHAT IF I CATCH MY PUPPY IN THE ACT OF CHEWING SOMETHING HE SHOULDN'T ?

The best action is to interrupt the chewing with a distraction, such as a loud clap of hands with an assertive "No !" ... or rattle a soda can with a few noise-making marbles or coins added. Then, as soon as you possibly can, offer a favorite chewy while praising your puppy ~ this lets your puppy know that it's OK to chew on this particular item.

But ... **NEVER hit or spank your puppy !!!** This will only create a fearful and untrusting pet, and can lead to a "sneaky chewer" that may only chew when the owner is not present.

WHAT IF I COME HOME AND SEE THAT MY PUPPY / DOG HAS CHEWED SOMETHING OF VALUE (rug, shoes, pillows, sofa cushion, etc)

Do nothing !!! If you try to scold your dog at that moment, you might feel better, but your dog has no idea what the yelling is all about !!! If you go off on a rant, then all you're doing is making your pet paranoid, and he/she will likely "look guilty" every time you come home, just waiting for you to go off on another rant whenever you return home ... and he/she won't understand why you are so agitated. Let me repeat myself here: He/she will come to expect that you will be enraged and screaming when you return home, but they won't understand why ! Truly, your dog cannot make the connection between being scolded and the unwanted chewing behavior **AFTER IT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED**. But it **CAN** make the distinction **IF** you break its pattern when you catch it in the act of chewing (see topic above).

MY PUPPY LOVES TO CHEW ON OUR HANDS AND FEET ? WHAT CAN WE DO ?

While nothing is 100% effective, I've had good success using Unscented Roll-On Anti-Perspirant. Apply it to your own hands and arms (and, if needed, your feet). Rub it generously onto your skin, allow it to dry, then allow the pup to chew on the treated areas on your skin. Most pups will be repelled, but some will chew regardless ~ but it's worth a try. If the anti-perspirant works, then use it frequently over a few days until the puppy is discouraged from chewing. Make sure that you use an unscented version since we do not want the pup to be able to detect it on your skin.

CONCLUSION

Every new puppy owner can expect a certain amount of chewing, whether based on curiosity, or tension-relief, or simple enjoyment of chewing. These preventive and corrective approaches mentioned above can help minimize problems while allowing your puppy to develop a healthy relationship with you. But it is crucial that these recommendations must be applied consistently to be effective.

- Dr Bob Parrish

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