



## Puppy Chewing Tips & Tricks

Many dogs love to chew! No surprise there. We never seem to mind a dog chewing until they destroy something of value to us.

### Why do they 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 not different from infant children routinely putting things in their mouth (pens, car keys, etc) as a means to explore the world around them. Some puppies are more "oral" than others. In particular, Retrievers (Labradors, Golden Retrievers, etc) typically enjoy chewing for their lifetime!

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

1. Emotional departures by the owners (separation anxiety)
2. Excessive attention to the pup
3. Social isolation
4. Delayed feeding
5. Monotony or boredom

When two or more pups live together, chewing may result from competition for articles. Chewing is an enjoyable & fun experience for nearly all pups and older dogs.

### How do I stop my puppy from chewing?

The best approach to destructive chewing is prevention. Guiding the pup to chewable articles, such as a ball or bone or Kong-type toy helps a pup distinguish between chewable and non-chewable items. All too often, we engage in activities that encourage a puppy to chew.

### Activities to avoid:

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

**Myth #1 If we give our puppy several toys at once, then he/she won't chew on the rugs, shoes, pillows, electric cords, etc.**

By having too many items to chew on, the puppy will not be able to tell the difference between what is OK and what is not OK to chew on. We recommend providing puppies with no more than 3 or 4 items to chew on at a time. Make sure that the toys are things that the puppy really likes to chew on. One of our favorite types 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.

**Myths #2 Sometimes dog owners think their pet's is chewing to be spiteful or seek 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 and he's getting even with me by chewing on the rug !" We've already established that there are multiple reasons why dogs chew, but chewing out of spite or revenge is not one of them.

We cannot expect to prevent all chewing. It's just the nature of some dogs to chew! Preventing destructive chewing should be the goal.

Just to recap:

1. Limit the number of toys available at any given time.
2. Giving a Kong or another chew toy that will encourage your dog to chew on something we want them to chew on.
3. Puppy-proof your house! Prevent access to the things we do not want them to chew on.
4. Confine your dog using a crate or using baby gates between rooms while unsupervised
5. Provide LOTS and LOTS of exercise and activity to drain their excess energy.
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.
7. 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 eventually 'train' your pup to avoid treated items.

## **Troubleshooting**

Q1: What if I catch my puppy in the act?

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 possible, replace the item with an approved chew toy while praising your puppy.

**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.

Q2: What if I come home and see that my puppy has already chewed up 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. Your dog cannot make the connection between being scolded and the unwanted chewing behavior AFTER IT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED. He/she can make the distinction IF you break the pattern when you catch them in the act of chewing (see topic above).

Q3: What can we do if my puppy likes to chew on our hands/feet?

While nothing is 100% effective, I've had good success using an 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 because of the bad taste and the fact that it has a powerful drying effect, but some pups 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. These recommendations must be applied consistently to be effective.