

DESTRUCTIVE CHEWING

Dogs engage in destructive chewing for a number of reasons, making it a very common problem. Chewing in puppies is a normal behavior and one of the main ways they explore their environment. Chewing also occurs in puppies that have a lot of energy that needs to be expended. If that energy does not get used physically, it is most likely to be used orally. Destructive chewing can also start in adults due to stressful events, like the arrival of a new baby, a change in schedules, erection of a barrier, inappropriate punishment, a delay in feeding times, or lack of environmental stimulation. Some destructive chewing occurs as a result of separation anxiety or thunderstorm phobias.

Mouthing behaviors in puppies have not been specifically linked to teething and tend to continue after the permanent teeth are in place. Since these mouth-oriented behaviors are normal for puppies, the puppy should not be punished if caught in the act of chewing. Rather, the puppy's attention should be diverted. Never let a puppy run loose in the house without supervision. It is common for puppy chewing to continue up to age 1 ½ years, so proper crate training is useful to save property as well as to housebreak young dogs. Muzzles can also be used when the puppy is out and cannot be watched constantly. You can also leash the dog to your belt to keep him out of mischief. Chewing on unacceptable items can be discouraged by taste aversion. Specific items that may be dangerous to the puppy, like electric cords, can be treated with a bad tasting substance (like bitter apple, hot sauce, or cayenne pepper) to keep the puppy from chewing on them. When you catch the dog in the act of chewing, you can spray a hissing spray can of air, squirt the dog with a water spray bottle, or shake an empty pop can with a few coins in it. The dog will learn to associate the negative feedback with chewing. If using this approach, do not chase or corner the dog. Reward the puppy as soon as the object is spit out. Another approach is to substitute an acceptable chew toy each time the dog starts chewing on the wrong item. Praise and reward the puppy for chewing on appropriate things.

Another technique involves controlling access to unacceptable things that the dog likes to chew by using remote punishment. In this technique, the dog views the punishment as coming from the item and does not make a connection to you. Each time the dog chews on the specific item, the punishment occurs. Punishment can be provided by taste or odor aversion, coating the object with sticky tape, or placing the object where, to reach it, the dog must trip a wire that is connected to something that falls and makes a lot of noise. Also, be sure to provide plenty of exercise to drain some of that puppy energy. A mouthy puppy can try your patience, but hard work to channel the chewing to a few specific toys is time well spent in the long run.

If the chewing is related to stress, a specific schedule or routine should be established. Routine helps minimize the stressful impact of changes in your pet's life. The dog's routine not only involves feeding schedules and elimination times but also specific times of interaction with you. Another important part of the dog's routine is exercise. This period of exercise should be long enough to use up excess energy, so there will be less energy to direct toward destructive chewing.

Call us today to set up a consultation if you are having problems with your pet chewing inappropriately.