

Dog 101

How to Stop Your Dog from Chewing

If you've ever been around a dog, you know they love to chew. Here's how to stop your dog's gnawing problem.

Although dogs make great use of their vision and sense of smell to explore the world, one of their favorite ways to take in new information is to put their mouths to work. Fortunately, chewing can be directed onto appropriate items so your dog doesn't destroy things you value or jeopardize his own safety. Until he's learned what he can and can't chew, however, it's your responsibility to manage the situation as much as possible so he doesn't have the opportunity to chew on unacceptable objects.

Here are three things you can do right now to help curb and redirect your dog's chewing obsession:

1 Understand why dogs chew

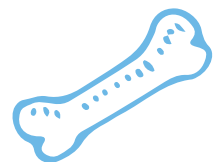
Like infants and toddlers, puppies explore their world by putting objects in their mouths. And, like babies, they teethe for about six months, which usually creates some discomfort. Chewing not only facilitates teething, but also makes sore gums feel better.

Adult dogs may engage in destructive chewing for any number of reasons. To deal with the behavior, you must first determine why your dog is chewing—and remember, he's not doing it to spite you.

Possible reasons for destructive chewing include:

- He wasn't taught what to chew and what not to chew when he was a puppy
- He's bored
- He suffers from separation anxiety
- His behavior is fear-related
- He wants attention

Be aware: You may need to consult a behavior professional for help with both separation anxiety and fear-related behaviors.



2 Teach your dog what can be chewed and what can't

Take responsibility for your own belongings. If you don't want it in your dog's mouth, don't make it available. Keep clothing, shoes, books, trash, eyeglasses, remote controls, and any other tempting chewables out of your dog's reach.

Give your dog toys that are clearly distinguishable from household goods. One of the best ways you can help your dog satisfy the urge to chew is by providing satisfying toys that he can chew on. Don't confuse him by offering shoes and socks as toys and then expecting him to distinguish between his shoe and yours.

Give your dog plenty of people-time. Your dog won't know how to behave if he isn't taught alternatives to inappropriate behavior, and he can't learn these when he's in the yard by himself.

Give your dog plenty of physical and mental exercise. If your dog is bored, he'll find something to do to amuse himself. A tired dog is a good dog, so make sure he gets lots of physical and mental activity. The amount of exercise should be based on age, health, and breed characteristics.

Replace the object. If you catch your dog chewing on something he shouldn't, offer him an acceptable chew toy instead, and praise him lavishly when he takes the toy in his mouth.

Give their gums the cold treatment. If your puppy is teething, try freezing a wet washcloth for him to chew on, which will soothe his gums. Supervise your puppy so he doesn't chew and swallow any pieces of the washcloth.

Make items unpleasant to your dog. Furniture and other items can be coated with a taste deterrent (such as Bitter Apple®) to make them unappealing. **Caution:** Supervise your dog when you first try one of these deterrents. Some dogs will chew an object even if it's coated with a taste deterrent. Also, be aware that you must reapply some of these deterrents to maintain their effectiveness.

Offer your dog a treat in exchange for what he's chewing on. As he catches on to this idea, you can add the command "Give" as his cue to release the object in exchange for the yummy treat.

Don't chase your dog if he grabs an object and runs. If you chase him, you are only giving your dog what he wants. Being chased by his human is fun! Instead, call him to you or offer him a treat.

3 Never discipline or punish your dog after the fact

If you discover a chewed item even minutes after he's chewed it, you're too late. Animals associate punishment with what they're doing at the time they're being corrected. It's impossible for your dog to reason, "I tore up those shoes an hour ago and that's why I'm being scolded now."

Some people believe this is what a dog is thinking because he runs and hides or because he "looks guilty." In reality, "guilty looks" are actually canine submissive postures that dogs show when they're threatened. When you're angry

and upset, your dog feels threatened by your tone of voice, body postures, and/or facial expressions, so he may hide or show submissive postures.

Punishment after the fact will not only fail to eliminate the undesirable behavior, but it could also provoke other undesirable behaviors.