

DESTRUCTIVE CHEWING

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Since it is natural for dogs to chew, most dogs engage in problem chewing at some point in their lives. This common problem can be solved, if handled properly...or it can plague the dog/owner relationship and be extremely expensive. It can even be fatal for the dog because owners often reach their limit and put an end to it.

The destructiveness usually starts during puppyhood when teething makes chewing necessary. Young puppies are very much like babies; they must be properly monitored or confined so they do not get into trouble. The home should be puppy-proofed by removing valuables from reach or by spraying them with bitter products which discourage chewing.

Many pet owners smother their dogs with so much attention that they over-bond to each other. In other words, the puppy becomes too attached and dependent on the owner. When left alone, he suffers from isolation anxiety which, in turn, may cause him to chew destructively.

New pet owners should avoid carrying the puppy excessively, stroking him for hours at a time, and letting him sleep in their bed. It's often difficult to resist, but you'll do your pet a favor if you give him enough independence to be normal and relaxed in your absence.

Giving your dog the right kinds of chew toys is a wise investment. Some owners will avoid spending \$20 on dog toys and end up losing a \$500 sofa as a result. You can improvise with household items, such as a knotted rope, plastic milk bottle, or a tennis ball. However, make sure that you never give the puppy an old sock or shoe as a toy. It will be too difficult for him to distinguish these from your good possessions.

Giving the puppy a lot of positive attention when he plays with his own toys will help. Many dog owners totally ignore their dog when it is playing with his own toys. These same owners will chase the puppy when he grabs the wrong thing, making it much more interesting than dog toys. When a puppy chews something he shouldn't, the best response is to start playing with a dog toy so that he will lose interest in the wrong object and come to play with you.

Games owners play with their dogs can also contribute to the problem. Rough housing and tug of war will hype dogs up and make them too mouthy.

Calm departures and arrivals will help to condition your dog to being calm in your absence. Rushing around before you leave or giving a long, emotional good-bye will excite the dog making him uneasy while you're gone. He may then chew as a tension reliever.

If you do come home to a mess, ignore it! After the fact corrections hurt your relationship with the dog but do nothing to correct the problem. Clean up in the dog's absence since your attention to the problem, though negative, is better than no attention and may thus encourage a repeat.

Wait and watch...contrive to catch the dog in the act of destruction, then toss something at him, squirt him with water, or make a loud, startling sound. You want him to associate the negative correction with the destructive behavior...not with you!