



Behavior Modification Handout

Destructive Behavior

Destructive chewing is number one on the hit list when it comes to problems with destructive behaviors. There are others, but inappropriate chewing probably outnumbers them all! Chewing is a normal behavior for a dog (like most destructive behaviors). Chewing to a dog is like reading a good book is to us. It is relaxing and a good way to spend some downtime. Dogs will engage in destructive behaviors for a variety of reasons, and in order to deal with the behavior you must first determine why your dog is being destructive.

Why Is My Dog Doing That ?

In the majority of cases dogs and puppies that have a problem with inappropriate chewing are bored and socially isolated. Chewing is a way for your pet to relieve anxiety; often times owners come home to find their remote control, shoes, underwear and other assorted personal items destroyed.

Owners are quick to think... "The dog did it because he was mad that I left him home alone all day." But from the dog's point of view, he is targeting these objects because they have a very strong owner scent (they smell like you). When your dog becomes anxious he seeks you out for comfort and the

feeling of safety and when you aren't there he will substitute the next best thing, something that smells like you. If your pet is a juvenile or an active breed type, the lack of adequate exercise may be the cause for destructive chewing.

Teething can also be a common reason for dogs in the age

range of five to seven months old. Of course, we will never know all the reasons dogs chew up our stuff, but my personal favorite is that dogs just like to chew because it's fun!

Managing Your Environment

This may be the easiest of all ways to prevent unacceptable behavior. By managing your environment we simply mean puppy proofing your home. If you do not want it chewed up, put it up! If you leave it out on the floor or somewhere the dog can easily get it, basically its fair game. This type of management saves a lot of frustration for you and your pet. Offering the right types of toys to chew on is also important. Don't give your dog an old shoe or sock to play with if you don't want him to chew up your shoes and socks. He can't tell the difference. Limit your dog's access to areas of the house that may be too tempting like your twelve year old son's room where basically everything he owns is on the floor. Using baby gates and keeping doors closed is a good way to limit or eliminate access. Crating your pet is also a good tool for limiting access when he cannot be supervised, such as at night when you are sleeping or during the day while you are at work.

Encouraging Appropriate Chewing

There are lots of things you can do to help your pet make good choices. It is up to you to train your dog or puppy to chew the right things and set him up for success. Limiting his ability to make mistakes will prevent bad habits from forming.

- Always supervise your pet. Good supervision is critical to this type of training. Use baby gates to limit his access to your home and keep him close to you. You can also put your pet on a leash while indoors and attach it to your belt loop or around your waist. This will keep him where you can see him.
- Provide appropriate chew toys and rotate them frequently. If you leave all the toys out all the time they get boring but if you keep a few stashed away and switch them out every couple days it's like getting a new toy!
- Use some chew toys that can be stuffed with kibble and treats, like a KONG. This will make it more interesting to your pet and keep him busy for hours. You can also scent toys by soaking them in a light chicken bouillon broth or place them in the bottom of your dirty clothes hamper (remember: he will like it if it smells like you).
- If you catch your puppy chewing on the wrong thing, interrupt the behavior with a loud "HEY" or clap your hands and then redirect him to an appropriate chew toy. Don't forget to praise him when he takes the toy and begins chewing on it.
- **IMPORTANT** – Use only chew toys that cannot be torn apart and ingested. Always supervise your pet when introducing a new toy to ensure his safety.
- Confine your pet when he cannot be supervised. A crate or a long-term confinement area like the kitchen or a bathroom may work well for you. Remember to puppy-proof the room before leaving your pet alone.

- Sign up for an obedience class! Learning the basics will help set the tone for future training and teach you how to train important commands like “leave it.”
- Make sure your puppy is getting enough exercise. You may be thinking he is getting enough exercise, but chances are if you are having behavior problems you need to increase it. Exercise should be consistent, structured and interactive. Letting your dog or puppy out to run around in the yard is not exercise.
- Family time is very important to your pet. Providing plenty of one-on-one time to play, exercise and just hang out is going to build strong emotional bonds and ensure a better- behaved household companion.
- Never punish your pet after the fact. Punishment will not only fail to correct the problem, it may even make your dog or puppy afraid of you. Other behavior problems could be the result of using punishment incorrectly.