



CHEWING

We use the term “chewing” in regard to chewing on *objects* rather than using their mouths on you or other people. Chewing is a normal, genetic and instinctive behavior that has a built-in reward system. Puppies that are free to chew on things usually do! The biggest danger in allowing destructive chewing to continue, (other than damage done to your house or property, or the possibility of the puppy ingesting part of the chew object), is that chewing can become a life-long occupation.

The most common reason that a puppy engages in chewing is teething, which generally happen over a period of time from 3 – 7 months of age. Adult teeth are not fully settled into their permanent positions until the pup is about a year old. During this period, the puppy’s gums can be sore and itchy. Chewing helps alleviate some of the discomfort. Other reasons that puppies chew are:

1. TO LEARN ABOUT THEIR ENVIRONMENT. Puppies don’t have hands, so they take things into their mouths.
2. TO RELIEVE STRESS caused by a number of things such as lack of sufficient exercise, isolation from his pack (you and your family), or a change in his environment or normal routine.
3. BOREDOM. This is a big one. Many of us work outside the home or attend school for a large part of the day. Consider this from the puppy’s point of view. He’s a young, very physically and mentally active animal left to his own devices for a large period of time. He’s a pack animal without companionship. Put yourself in his place. Wouldn’t you look for something stimulating to do with your time?
4. PHYSICAL PROBLEMS. If your puppy is chewing on himself, he may be suffering from allergies or have a flea problem. Consult your veterinarian.

HOW DO YOU ENCOURAGE YOUR PUPPY TO CHEW ON ACCEPTABLE ITEMS?

SUPERVISE, SUPERVISE, AND SUPERVISE!! Make sure that you watch your puppy closely. Don’t allow him to wander off on his own to investigate the house for delectable, but inappropriate items to chew on.

CONFINEMENT. When you are not able to watch him, he should be confined to a crate or in an area where he only has access to things that are OK for him to chew.

PREVENTION. Provide the puppy with acceptable chewable items. Never give him things to chew on that resemble something you will never want him to have in his mouth, such as old shoes or other items of old clothing. He will not be able to discriminate between old, discarded stuff and your new, good stuff.

Take responsibility for yourself and become a tidy person. Put your shoes in the closet as soon as you take them off and shut the door. Don't leave soiled clothing in places that are accessible to the puppy. Store chewable items on shelves out of the puppy's reach. Close doors or use baby gates to limit the puppy's access to rooms where you keep items of value or importance. Don't be in a hurry to give your puppy unsupervised freedom in your home until you are certain that he is through the teething stage. Experiment with small periods of freedom, and then if successful, increase the amount of time gradually. If there is a particular thing that seems to be especially attractive to your puppy that you cannot close off or put out of reach, try putting a bad-tasting substance on it. Products such as "Bitter Apple" have a terrible taste and serve as a self-teaching lesson to the puppy that chewing on the thing it is applied to is not a pleasant experience. You may have to re-apply the product more than once if the puppy returns to the scene of the crime.

If you do discover him in the act of chewing on something inappropriate, DO NOT RUN up to him yelling NO at the top of your voice. He may simply be frightened and take off running for cover, possibly taking the chewed item with him. You have then possibly taught him several undesirable things:

1. To be frightened of you when you move quickly toward him.
2. To chew on things only when you are not around.
3. That he is much faster than you and that this new game of "Take the Object and Run" is a lot of fun and seems to excite you too. Instead, accept responsibility for the fact that your puppy was permitted access to the chewed item and quietly go up to him and offer him something acceptable in exchange for the chewed item or lure him away to another area and provide him with something else to chew on.

Scolding or physically disciplining a puppy an hour—or even five minutes—after he chewed something up is pointless. He may look guilty or sad while you are correcting him, but he will not associate your anger with something that he did an hour or five minutes ago. During puppyhood, it is our responsibility to take steps to prevent our puppies from getting into situations where they have access and the unsupervised time to chew on inappropriate items.