

What to Do with Your Chewing Puppy!

By Brandy J. Lyle, MA (doggiewebmaster@doggiedoor.com)

ALL puppies chew. It is what they do naturally. They chew on mom, on each other, and just about anything that fits in their mouth that doesn't taste bad. They "explore" a new item by putting it in their mouths and taking a good bite into it. Chewing is normal to them. It is we "people" who view it as "bad" or "destructive." Therefore it is our responsibility to teach our pups what is appropriate to chew, and what is not.

First of all, supply your puppy with a variety of chew toys. He needs chew toys that outlast his teeth (rubber "Kong" toys, some nylabones, hard dog bones, etc.), and others that he can really get his teeth into (stuffed toys, rawhides, real sticks, etc.). Add some squeaky toys, balls, tug-o-ropes, and whatever else you think your pup will enjoy that won't hurt him. Some of the things my dogs thoroughly enjoyed when they were puppies were cardboard boxes, ice cubes, apples, carrots, empty milk cartons, empty ice cream cartons, and just about anything that we would've thrown away. If it wasn't going to hurt them, we'd let them chew on it for awhile before we threw it out.

Now that you have lots of toys and a good variety, put all of the non-perishable ones in a "toy box" for your pup. The toy box can be made out of anything; however, expect that it will also be chewed! I use a "kitty bed" as a toy box. The fabric is like a stuffed animal and I can throw the whole thing in the washer. (Don't use the kind that is made of foam, unless you like cleaning up shredded bits of chewed-up foam!)

Now that you're prepared, you must teach your pup how much fun his toy box really is, that it's more fun than shoes, or socks, or table legs. You begin by hiding a favorite toy or a food treat in the middle of the toy box, and then bring him over to the toy box saying "Go Look in Your Toy Box!" (you are teaching him a command that he will inevitably learn in a few months, as long as you say it consistently and happily.) Start rummaging through the toy box yourself, with your hands, encouraging him to look at (and put in his mouth) things that you pull out. If he starts rummaging himself praise him and be really happy about it. When he finds his favorite toy play with him with it, if he finds a food treat, praise him while he eats it.

Always keep his toy box in an accessible place (you can keep it in your bedroom, but if he chews the legs of the coffee table you may need more than one toy box.) If you want to keep your table legs you've got to think more puppy-like! If he chews the coffee table legs, put the toy box by or under the coffee table. You want to make it as easy as possible for him to do good! Which also means, don't put every toy in his toy box. Depending on the chewing ability of your pup, you may need to scatter a lot of chew toys and have a reserve in his toy box. Put chew toys where your dog most often chews inappropriate items. If he chews pillows, have at least 3 different types of chew toys for him to discover before he gets to the pillows. If he steals shoes from the closet, keep your closet door closed! If you can't seem to manage closing the door, than put chew toys outside the closet so he'll find them before the shoes. (Of course, do not use "old shoes" as chewtoys unless you want your expensive ones chewed up too.)

Your pup now knows he has a toy box, he's got plenty of toys in it, and there are other toys around the house for him to stumble across and chew. Now you get to start teaching. Don't discipline your dog for chewing something you deem inappropriate after the fact. After all, you weren't there to tell him it was inappropriate, and it was really good to him! If you find your favorite book torn to shreds, take it as a reminder not to leave it on the floor (or on the table that the pup can reach) next time. You must catch the pup in the act. So next time you see him running down the hall with your shoe, or chewing anything inappropriate, quickly and in surprising manner "swoop" it out of his mouth. The goal is not to hurt him, it is to surprise him. Say "No Chewing" and very quickly replace the inappropriate item with an appropriate chew toy, (another reason why it helps to have them all around the house.) Give him his chew toy and when he takes it say "Good chewing!!!" Give him LOTS of Praise!!! If there is not an appropriate chew toy around, (and/or after he begins understanding a little) you can run him over to his toy box after the "No Chewing" command and say "Go Look in your Toy Box"! Make it a big game, help him find a good toy and give lots of Praise. Remember that you are teaching your pup a lesson every time he chews something

inappropriate, so always teaching your pup a lesson every time he chews something inappropriate, so always end your teaching lesson with PRAISE. You will have a dog more willing to please you.

Well, that's basically it. Easier said than done! The most important and most difficult thing about this is to be consistent. You will feel like you're getting nowhere at times, but hang in there, he will learn it! The most effective part of his teaching process is the praise part, so never forget or belittle that part. Your pup will learn much quicker if he is convinced that you are ecstatically happy about him chewing on his chew toys. He may begin to bring you toys as a "prize," so you will praise him. Don't neglect this wonderful opportunity to reinforce desirable behavior! If your pup brings you a toy, praise him, take the toy from him using a "Give," "Drop it," "Leave it," or "Thank You" command. Look at the toy with enthusiasm, and then give it back with more praise. By doing this you are encouraging him to pick appropriate chew toys as well as beginning to train him to let you take things out of his mouth. (This is invaluable if he ever gets into something bad for him.)

So, you've done everything right, you have a very smart puppy, and he is just a Chew Maniac – he chews all his toys, but isn't satisfied for very long and keeps looking for more interesting items! Take his Kong toy, or bone, or ball, or anything that has a hole through it, and put peanut butter inside the hole (some people prefer Cheeze Whiz.) This is very useful when you leave the house because it keeps him busy for quite awhile, lessens anxiety, and tires his "chew muscles" out a little bit. Another good time to give him the "find the PB" treat is when he has a usual Chew-mania time. I had a pup that wanted to chew until kingdom come in the early evening. I don't know why. He just had a lot of "chew" energy then, I guess.

If your puppy is overzealous, first exercise him!!!! Get him tired physically, then tire out his chew muscles. Your puppy will appreciate softer items around 5 or 6 months when he will be teething: stuffed toys, cardboard, and also ice cubes help numb the gums and can lessen the teething pain. Another numbing chew toy can be a cloth soaked in water, twisted, then frozen. He may also experience a renewed interest in chewing around 8, 9, or 10 months. This is usually when his last molars are coming in. The problem here is that your dog may be much bigger and stronger than when he was only 5 or 6 months old! If you took the time to teach him the appropriate things to chew when he was younger, it will be much easier on you (and your furniture).

If your 8-10-month-old dog decides that furniture legs are the new thing to chew, I suggest you block access to them if possible, and bring in some big sticks (yes, real sticks) the fat kind that he can't break in two. I've found that this seems to get most people through this period quite well. You must be willing, however, to clean up shredded sticks! I opt that over furniture any day!

Remember that your puppy is just a puppy. He's only been on this earth for a few months, you probably haven't even gone to the dentist since he was born! He wants to please you more than anything in the world. Give him every opportunity to do just that! Never tell him "NO" without teaching him in the process. Always say "NO SOMETHING" item to his chewing. I lost the side of my couch, a friend lost his TV remote control, it comes with the territory. But what a wonderful territory it is!

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