

Chewing & Destructive Behavior

All Paws K-9 Academy

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1. Dogs normally go through an oral stage, like teething, at 3 months of age and again at 6 mos. It is natural and normal for them to do this. Provide safe chew toys that are different than objects you want the dog to avoid. For example, do not use an old shoe for a chew toy. The dog cannot tell the difference between new shoes and old shoes.
2. Don't play "tug of war" games. This type of game orients the dog to oral play and will reinforce biting and chewing behavior.
3. Feed multiple times a day so the pup or older dog has some oral stimulation that is OK. Feeding only once a day leaves the dog with an empty stomach for many hours, this invites chewing.
4. Very common is eating or chewing articles that belong to the owner. This usually occurs when the dog is left alone. Don't handle commonly chewed things in front of the pet if you can help it. Seeing you handle these items makes the pet want to chew them more. If you are home and notice the pet chewing on forbidden items, toss a can full of pennies on the floor near the pet to startle it or use some other startle response (clapping loudly, shouting, smacking the wall with a newspaper, water pistol, air gun, etc.) **NEVER STRIKE THE PET**. Don't speak to the dog during the correction. We want to de-personalize the correction so the pet will not use the behavior to get attention from the owner.
5. Tone down your emotions with the pet. Over-indulgence in emotions makes a pet so dependent on you that when you are gone, a LOT of tension is created. Keep petting sessions short, make the pet "sit" or do something to please you before lavishing love, praise, petting on the dog.
6. When getting ready to leave the house, you may notice your dog getting more and more anxious as you go through your ritual of jangling keys, getting your coat, closing doors, switching off lights, etc. To de-fuse this situation, try just taking 5 minutes to sit down in the place the dog will occupy in your absence. Read the paper, watch TV, ignore the dog, or just gather your thoughts for the day's activities. This sets a calm, unconcerned prelude to departure. Do not even make eye contact with the dog, then get up and leave without any words or ceremony.
7. Plenty of exercise and playtime relaxes a dog. Remember that dogs should play or exercise until they are panting with effort. They need "aerobics" just like we do.
8. After coming home, don't make a big fuss to greet your pet. Say "Hi" and then go about your business for five minutes. THEN you may want to ask the dog to sit and give it a nice hello. Do this in an area away from the door you entered. This avoids too much emotion in the area of your homecoming.
9. NEVER punish the dog after finding chewed up or destroyed articles. It may make you furious to find these things, but try not to take it out on your pet. It is too late to do any good by punishing the pet for the destructive behavior.

10. Obedience training is an excellent exercise for you and your pet. It reinforces good behavior and teaches the pet that it can get attention from the owner in positive ways.
11. Pica (ingestion of non food items) is most often not caused by a disease although persistent cases should have a GI and hepatic (liver) workup, as well as a thorough investigation for parasites, especially tape worms. Remember, dogs and cats having fleas often have tapeworms. Tapeworms come from the cat or dog eating the flea as they groom themselves. Then the cyst form of the tapeworm is released from the flea's body as it is digested and the dog or cat is infected with the tapeworm.
12. Administration of some psychoactive drugs can help modify behavior. Clomipramine 1 mg/kg q 24 hrs, a tricyclic anti-depressant and serotonin uptake inhibitor. Also, cyproheptadine for cats, 4 mg/cat q 24 hrs. It is an appetite stimulant and serotonin antagonist.
13. When no pathological cause for pica is found (malnourishment, hunger, vitamin deficiency, parasitism or other disease):
 - i. limit access to nonfood items to prevent ingestion
 - ii. find a safe substitute that the animal can ingest with impunity, maybe a high fiber diet fed more often.
 - iii. treat commonly ingested non-food items with bitter apple or some pungent or bitter taste.