

# Dealing with Normal Puppy Behavior

## Chewing



Whoever thought raising a child is the toughest thing to do may not have raised a puppy. After all, at least babies can wear diapers! Much like infants and toddlers, though puppies explore their world putting things in their mouths. Puppies are teething until they're about six months old, which usually creates some discomfort. Chewing not only facilitates teething, it also relieves sore gums.

Puppies may chew on furniture, shoes, shrubbery and other objects. These are normal puppy behaviors but they can still create problems. Unfortunately, unlike children, puppies won't magically "outgrow" these behaviors as they mature. Instead you must shape your puppies behaviors and teach him which ones are acceptable and which are not.

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### Section 1: Discouraging Unacceptable Behaviors

It's virtually inevitable that your puppy will, at some point, chew something you value. This is part of raising a puppy! You can, however, prevent most problems by taking the following precautions.

- Minimizing chewing problems by puppy-proofing your house. Put the trash out of reach – inside a cabinet or outside on the porch or buy containers with locking lids. Encourage children to pick up their toys and don't leave socks, shoes, eyeglasses, briefcases, or TV remote controls lying around within your puppy's reach.
- If, and only if, you catch your puppy doing something he shouldn't be, interrupt the behavior with a loud noise, then offer him an acceptable chew toy instead. Praise him lavishly when he takes the toy in his mouth.
- Make acceptable chew items unpleasant to your puppy. Furniture and other items can be coated with a taste deterrent to make them unappealing.

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- Do not give your puppy objects to play with such as old socks, old shoes or old children's toys that closely resemble items that are off limits. Puppies cannot tell the difference between the two.
- Closely supervise your puppy. Do not give him an opportunity to go off by himself, and get into trouble or danger. Use baby gates, close doors, or tether him to you with a six foot leash so you can keep an eye on him.
- When you must be away from home or cannot actively supervise your puppy, confine him to a small, safe area such as a laundry room. You might also consider crate training your puppy. Puppies under 6 months of age, should not be crated for longer than three or four hours at a time; they may not be able to control their bowels and bladders longer than this.
- Ensure your puppy is getting adequate physical activity. Walking your puppy or playing a game of fetch will provide both mental and physical exercise.
- Give your puppy plenty of "people time". He can only learn the rules of your home when he is with you.

## **Section 2: Encouraging Acceptable Behavior**

- Provide your puppy with lots of appropriate toys.
- Rotate your puppy's toys. Puppies are often more interesting in unfamiliar or novel objects. Put out a few for several days, then swap them out with different ones.
- Experiment with different kinds of toys. When you introduce a new toy to your puppy, watch him to make sure he won't destroy it and ingest the pieces.
- Consider various types of toys that can be stuffed with food. Putting tidbits of food inside chew toys focuses your puppy's chewing activities on those toys instead of unacceptable objects.
- If your puppy is teething, try freezing a wet washcloth for him to chew on.

## **Section 3: Other Reasons for Destructive Behavior**

In most cases, destructive chewing by puppies is nothing more than normal puppy behavior. Occasionally however puppies, like adult dogs, can exhibit destructive behaviors for specific reasons. Separation anxiety, fear and attention getting can all lead to destructive behavior. For help, consult with a professional Animal Behaviorist.

## **Section 4: What Not to Do**

Never discipline your puppy after the fact. If you discover a chewed item even minutes after he has chewed it, it's too late to discipline. Animals associate corrections with what they are doing at the time they are being corrected. A puppy does not have the ability to reason through and understanding that chewing up shoes an hour ago causes a scolding now.

A dog's "guilty look" is actually a canine submissive posture they show when they are feeling threatened. When an owner is angry or upset, their puppy can feel threatened by tone of voice, body posture and facial expressions. Therefore he may hide or show submissive postures. Punishment after the fact will not only fail to eliminate the undesirable behavior but could provoke other undesirable behaviors as well.

A puppy has a lot to learn in a new home. Patience and consistency when training will help guarantee success and promote a long relationship and special bond for years to come.