



## Destructive Chewing in Dogs

**Kelley Bollen, MS, CABC, Director of Behavior Programs, Maddie's Shelter Medicine Program, Cornell University**

Chewing is a natural behavior in dogs. They use their mouths to explore and investigate their environment. If the dog is not provided with appropriate chew toys and encouraged to use them, this natural behavior often results in damage to valued household items. Puppies that are teething can be especially destructive. Providing your puppy with plenty of chew toys and properly supervising him will help save your furniture, shoes, and other precious possessions.

Purchase a dozen or so chew toys for your dog and rotate them so he doesn't get bored. Encourage toy usage by incorporating his toys into play sessions or by smearing food in or on the item to increase its appeal. Praise your dog for chewing on his own toys. If you catch him chewing on an inappropriate item, ask him to "give" in exchange for a food treat and then replace the item with one of his toys. Do not expect your dog to know the difference between his toys and other items you have left on the floor. Having a dog forces us to be a little neater.

Do not provide your dog with chew toys that look like items he is not allowed to chew on. Giving your dog an old pair of sneakers or socks only muddies the water. His chew toys should clearly be chew toys!

Often times, dogs learn that getting a hold of a forbidden object brings attention from their owner. In order to get rid of this attention seeking destructive behavior you must learn not to respond to it. **DO NOT** get into a game of chase with your dog even if it means sacrificing the item. This is exactly what he wants, and oh how fun it is! Be sure to give your dog plenty of attention when he is being good. It's also advisable to teach your puppy a "drop it" command so that you can retrieve items he has gotten a hold of without engaging in a chase.

Never punish "after the fact". If you do not catch your dog in the act of chewing you **CAN NOT** punish him. The dog will not connect the two events and he will just learn to be afraid of you.

If your dog destroys things in the house only when you are away, he may be suffering from separation anxiety. Talk to a behaviorist about behavior modification to treat this condition.