

Chewing and Destructive Behavior in Dogs

Dogs don't chew out of anger or spite. They chew because they are dogs and dogs have a natural, instinctual desire to chew. It helps alleviate boredom in dogs of all ages. Above all other reasons, it's enjoyable... chewing feels good! Chewing itself is often not what gets the dog into trouble; it's **what** they chew that can strain your relationship.

Items to Avoid as Chew Toys

- An old shoe, sock or any other article of clothing should not be used as a dog's chew toy. While dogs can be trained to discriminate between their toys and items that are off limits, it's an extra step in training and it is usually easier to stick to "official" dog toys.
- A treat that is quickly consumed, such as a dog biscuit, is not a chew toy. It will not keep the dog busy long enough to keep him out of trouble. Rawhides are usually consumed rather quickly as well, and can cause intestinal blockages in some dogs.

Appropriate Chew Toys

The following are guidelines and suggestions to use when selecting an appropriate chew toy for your dog:

- A toy that can be chewed on until the dog is exhausted; often made of hard rubber or plastic.
- A toy more interesting and better tasting than the furniture or your personal belongings.
- Toys such as Kongs™ or hollow, sterilized beef bones. These items can be stuffed with dog treats, peanut butter, cheese spread, canned food, or anything else the dog finds extremely appealing and that will take some time to lick out of the center of the toy.
- Buster cubes or other hard, plastic toys that can be filled with dry kibble or dry food treats. As the dog "works" the cube or ball (pushes it with his nose or paw), the food is randomly dispersed from the toy. This exercises the dog's mind as well as his muscles.

If you are creative with your dog's toys, providing variety and interest, you will have a dog that is addicted to his toys in no time. Until you have trained him what is appropriate to chew on, your dog need to be supervised so he doesn't go in search of *your* toy or *your* furniture.

When you cannot be with your dog in the house, keep him confined with only his toys within reach. (See handout, "Crate Training Your Dog") Keep laundry and waste paper baskets behind closed doors and shoes in the closet. Redirect any inappropriate chewing to the chew toys. Take time to praise your dog when he is chewing on the correct items.

If you don't take the time initially to teach appropriate chewing habits and only reprimand inappropriate chewing, your dog will quickly learn to chew only when you are not present...and he will choose his own object. ***Remember: dogs need to chew... best to teach him right because he will find something when you aren't around!***

A Word About Separation Anxiety

If your dog is chewing around door frames, window ledges, or tearing up carpeting or tile around exit routes in your home, he may be suffering from separation anxiety. If this occurs or if he is hurting himself in an effort to escape (i.e. raw nose, raw pads of feet, broken nails or teeth), your situation may not be resolved by providing chew toys. You may need the help of a qualified behavior consultant.

The Kentucky Humane Society offers a variety of classes, seminars and private training opportunities designed to teach your dog manners, resolve problem behaviors, strengthen the bond between you and your pet, and ultimately ensure a lasting and ***enjoyable*** relationship. For more information, please call (502) 366-3355.