

## CHEWING

A dog is in a natural behavioral pattern when he is chewing. From the dog's point of view, chewing serves the same purpose as reading a book, playing tennis, or lighting a big cigar after dinner. Dogs chew to relax. However, dogs chew for many other reasons, and if the behavior is not corrected properly, it can develop into a destructive habit that may jeopardize the dog-owner relationship.

One reason why a dog chews is because he is teething. Naturally, this happens only with puppies. As with children, when a dog's teeth are cutting the gums, much pain is involved, and the natural outlet is to chew. For the lucky owner it might just be a sock, but for the unlucky owner it might be a Chippendale table. Most dogs are finished teething by the age of nine months, which means that the owner should prepare for the chewing phase.

Now that the problem has been defined, what can be done about it? Chewing can be a 24-hour-a-day process, so the bulk of the training must be accomplished by the family. Again, put yourself in the puppy's position. He is in pain. If your child were teething, you would go to a drugstore and buy a commercial product to relieve the pain, and then you would buy the biggest teething ring that you could find. Well, the commercial product is great for the dog, but replace the teething ring with a rawhide bone and latex rubber toys. Remember - a dog's attention span is limited. Thus, the puppy will become bored with the one or two toys that you bought him and - you guessed it - back to the Chippendale table. We recommend buying a dozen rawhide bones and putting down six of them. Leave them down for two days, then replace with the other six new bones. On the fifth day, the new batch of bones will be replaced by the old ones, which will again become new toys for the puppy.

Another way to relieve teething pain is to give the dog an ice cube. This will numb the gums, making the puppy more comfortable. Yet another method that we learned from a little old Italian grandmother is to take a washcloth and a rawhide bone, wet them both, roll the rawhide bone in the washcloth, and place it in your freezer. When given to the dog, the soothing effect of the coldness from the frozen washcloth will numb the gums, and psychologically the dog's reward will be the rawhide bone. Remember - these tips are for your dog's teething problem only. To answer a frequently asked question, a two-year-old dog is not teething, because teething is completed by the eighth or ninth month.

Boredom is perhaps the most misunderstood reason why dogs chew. The bored chewer is sometimes confused with the spiteful chewer. When left alone, he will chew on anything and, in extreme cases, even on himself. A bored chewer needs more in his life to relieve the boredom. You could leave him a good book to read but would probably come home to find it in a million pieces. Imagine yourself staying at home from nine to five with nothing to do. You might even start to chew - on food, gum or cigarettes. To solve the problem, leave new or favorite toys on the floor just before leaving, and pick them up immediately upon arriving home. In this manner the dog's attention will be geared to the excitement of these toys for a couple of hours, thus eliminating some of the boredom. The bored dog is very often a lonely dog. By leaving a radio on a "talk" station, the dog might believe that he is really not alone after all, that a friend is nearby. And you might be surprised at some of the interesting knowledge that the dog will gain! We have had some marvelous discussions with our dog after he has listened to the Joyce Brothers talk show.

Dogs that are not receiving a nutritionally balanced diet also will sometimes have a stronger tendency to chew. Before the dog is corrected for this, be sure that the physiological problem is resolved, then proceed with the methods used for the other chewing problems. The need to chew might be an instinctive problem. The need to chew might be an instinctive search by the dog to balance his diet. You may suspect that your dog's diet is vitamin or mineral deficient if he eats plants, dirt and garbage.

Ah yes - the spiteful chewer. This is the dog that everybody thinks they have. Well, folks, don't let this come as a blow to your ego, but this is usually the least common reason for chewing. Although dogs are very smart, they are not capable of rationalizing a plot to destroy a valued possession just because they are angry that you left them alone. The spiteful dog is created by the owner who overreacts to the dog's chewing, thus rewarding the dog with attention. Even though this is negative attention, dogs can be easily geared to respond to it. So although it may appear that the dog is chewing to be spiteful, other motives may be behind the dog's destructive actions.

The methods used to solve all types of chewing problems incorporate two basic ideas - prevent and correct. The use of commercial sprays available at local pet stores is widespread. Some of the products will work only with certain dogs. The one product that we found most consistently successful is called bitter apple. Grannicks Bitter Apple has proven especially effective. The odor prevents chewing, and the taste reminds the dog that he has

done something wrong.

Another good product is alum, a powder that can be found at local drugstores. To use alum, mix it with a little water to make a pasty substance, then apply it to areas of anticipated chewing. Alum has no odor, but the unpleasant taste will remind the dog of his deviant behavior. Alum should be replenished every two days because it may lose its potency when exposed to the air.

Some of the commercial products sold to stop babies from sucking their thumbs may also be used on items that the dog may be chewing. Because these products come in small bottles, use them on smaller items only. Use at least two of these products then baiting the items that a dog may chew. This is a must. If only one product is used, the dog might become accustomed to the taste, or at least he will be able to anticipate the taste. If he knows what to expect, he might just grit his teeth, so to speak, and chew the furniture anyway.

**EXERCISE!!** Capitalized with two exclamation points. Why? Because most chewing problems as well as many other behavioral problems result from the lack of exercise. This is perhaps the most overlooked area of dog ownership. The success of your corrections will be minimal if the dog is not receiving sufficient exercise. An example of this would be the young couple living in a new high-rise apartment building whose Irish setter receives only three walks a day because of the owner's busy schedule. For this particular breed of dog, this not enough exercise. Again, dog ownership is a responsibility, and this couple should make the time to exercise the dog properly. "And what," they ask, "will happen if we do not?" If they are very lucky, nothing. However, in most cases the dog will have to let out its frustrations in one way or another. The most common way is by running around the house, playing with and chewing anything and everything. He will also probably jump on and annoy every guest who walks through the door. This couple should compensate the dog's lack of exercise by a run in the park or a frisbee catch on the beach. A dog, just as a child, has a certain amount of energy that must be expended. It is up to the owner to gear this energy in the proper directions. A dog owner must keep in mind exactly what type of dog he owns. He must remember and think about what this dog was originally bred to do. It would be absurd for a German Shepherd, as a working dog, to be content with several walks a day, particularly as a younger dog. And do not be fooled if you live in a house and have a backyard in which the dog spends a great deal of time. Most dogs when let out alone will romp at first, but then they will lie down or simply walk around. They are not going to run around the yard playfully by themselves for any great period of time. Think of yourself playing tennis alone, hitting the ball against a wall. This might be somewhat tiring, but your energy output would not be nearly the same as if you were playing on a tennis court with an opponent hitting the ball all over the court. The same holds true for your dog. He needs someone outside with him, playing with him and making him run. An exercise program is vital for your dog to keep in shape and to minimize his behavioral problems. And it probably would not do you any harm either!

Everybody has a tendency to think that their dog's problems are the worst, when in reality most of them can be corrected easily. When confronted with this attitude, we often respond by telling our favorite "James Bond of the dog world" story - the Siberian husky that ate through a closet wall in an elite high-rise and went into the neighbor's apartment. After consuming a favorite chair, he demolished a 500-year-old heirloom carpet, among other things. After hearing this true story, most dog owners look at their own pet and say, "Hey, you're not that bad! I guess there's hope after all!" Then the dog looks up at the owner as if to say, "I have been trying to tell you that all along. Just take the time to listen to me." At the risk of being redundant, remember that your dogs will try to communicate. If you are a good owner, you will take the time to listen and respond accordingly.

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