



BEHAVIOR
SERIES

Dealing with Normal Puppy Behavior

Chewing

WHETHER YOU THOUGHT THAT 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 by 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, but also makes sore gums feel better.

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

Discouraging Unacceptable Behaviors

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

- Minimize 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 chewing on something he shouldn't, 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 unacceptable chew items unpleasant to your puppy. Furniture and other items can be coated with a taste deterrent (such as Bitter Apple®) to make them unappealing. (See "Using Aversives to Modify Your Dog's Behavior.")
- Don't 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 can't tell the difference.
- Closely supervise your puppy. Don't give him the chance to go off by himself and get into trouble. Use baby gates, close doors, or tether him to you with a six-foot leash so that you can keep an eye on him.
- When you must be gone from your home or you can't actively supervise your puppy, confine him to a small, safe area such as a laundry room. You might also consider crate training your puppy. (See "Crate Training Your Dog.") Puppies under six months of age shouldn't be crated for longer than three or four hours at a time because they may not be able to control their bladders and bowels longer than that.
- Make sure your puppy is getting adequate physical activity. Puppies (and dogs) left alone in a yard don't play by themselves. Take your puppy for walks or play a game of fetch with him for both mental and physical exercise.

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