



BEHAVIOR
SERIES

Using Aversives to Modify Your Dog's Behavior

IF THERE'S ANY TRUTH TO THE SAYING “idle hands are the Devil's playground,” then the same can certainly be said for idle paws. If you're afraid to leave your dog alone for more than a few minutes for fear of what you'll return to, try using devices called “aversives” to discourage your dog from taking a particular action or entering an area that's off-limits.

Aversives are tools and techniques that can be used to keep dogs away from particular places or to stop them from engaging in certain behaviors. Finding the right aversive for the objective at hand is often a case of trial and error, as some dogs are immune to a little soaking from a squirt bottle, and others might think that by shaking a can full of pennies, you're telling them it's treat time.

And remember that even after you've found the best method to discourage a dog from a particular action or place, the approach will seldom work effectively unless you offer a *positive* alternative that is both convenient and rewarding.

What are some typical aversives used by dog caregivers? Here's a rundown of some common deterrents, each of which will have varying degrees of success depending on the objective and the dog.

Textures

One great way to keep your dog away from certain areas is to surround (or cover) the area with materials that make your dog's paws uncomfortable.

Indoors, try shelf paper (sticky side up) or double-sided carpet tape. Heavy *plastic* carpet runner (pointed side up) can also be used effectively in some situations. You may

need to weight the material firmly or tape it down to ensure it stays put. To protect furniture or floor finishes from sticky substances, attach the aversive to a piece of foil or heavy plastic and secure that with weights or light tape.

Outdoors, try irregularly shaped rocks, or chicken wire firmly set into the ground, sharp edges rolled under.

These tools are more effective for puppies, small dogs, and low-energy dogs than for those who won't let a little obstacle stand in their way.

Tastes

Because most dogs do much of their investigative work (and much of their damage) with their mouths, anything displeasing to the tastebuds will often work quite well. Some of the following substances may damage furniture or floor finishes, however, so be sure to test them in a hidden location before widespread use.

- Bitter Apple® or similar sprays and gels marketed specifically for taste aversion
- Insect repellents, especially those containing citronella or citrus odors (check for toxicity—if it's safe for young children, it's generally safe for pets)
- Some muscle rubs

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