Puppy Behavior: Chewing

Puppies need to chew, period. When you bring home a young dog, you need to expect that at some point something you care about is going to be destroyed. Since chewing isn't optional for pups, they need time and practice to learn what's allowed and what's not.

How do puppies learn the rules? With consistent feedback: praise and encouragement when they chew the things that are theirs along with plenty of options for great chew toys, and no chances to make mistakes when you're not there to let them know.

Try the following steps to deal with your puppy’s need to chew:

**Make your house puppy-safe.** Pick up everything, including shoes, kids' toys, laundry, purses and bags, remote controls, and books and papers, and put it out of dog’s reach. Even if you don’t think a puppy would be interested in it, put it away.

**Give your pup safe and appealing chew toys.** Make sure there are plenty of stuffed Kongs, sturdy chews, and fun toys around. When your puppy engages with these toys, let them know that that's what you like. Remember that puppies--and later, dogs--can't tell the difference between a new shoe or sock that's yours and an old one that you're done with, so don't give things to your puppy to play with that will sometimes be off-limits.

**Supervise and manage.** Keep your eyes on your puppy--just a minute out of your sight is enough time for a curious young dog to do a lot of damage. When you're not able to supervise, make a safe place for your puppy to be where they can't damage inappropriate things and where they have lots of the right toys and chews. See "Dog Toys and How to Use Them."

**Discourage chewing of inappropriate items.** When you're there to supervise, you can give your dog immediate feedback if they pick up the wrong thing. A well-timed loud, interruptive sound, followed by offering an appropriate toy and sincere praise when they take it will let your dog know what you like. You can use deterrents such as bitter apple on furniture and other items that you want your dog to leave alone. For more information, see "Keeping Your Dog Out of or Off of: Aversives and Deterrents for Dogs."

**Give your pup enough exercise and time with you.** A puppy with excess energy will do more chewing, and a bored, energetic puppy can make a big mess. Make sure you get your puppy tired each day, and give them time with the family to have fun and learn the rules.

For more information, see the book *Before and After You Get Your Puppy* by Dr. Ian Dunbar. This book is available online, in most bookstores, and in the Sacramento SPCA retail store.

For more information on behavior and training for dogs and cats, please visit our web site at [www.sspca.org/pet-carebehavior/](http://www.sspca.org/pet-carebehavior/).

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