



Good Habits are Hard to Break

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Inappropriate chewing and household destruction

Does your family room look like the sight of a natural disaster in spite of your regular cleaning schedule? Have you ever come home to a roomful of cotton fiber “snow”? Are your table legs being used as toothpicks?

If so, you don't have to live like this any longer, help is on the way! Order your new furniture with confidence, and while you are waiting for the delivery Open Paw will help you teach your dog basic household manners.

It is important to remember that your beloved pet is not being bad, but simply expressing normal doggie behavior. It is your job to provide appropriate outlets for your furry friend and to teach them how to use these outlets instead of your furniture etc.

Problem-Chewing

Inappropriate chewing can be very irritating to us humans, because it can be very expensive – and besides, no one likes to come home to find his favorite pair of shoes mangled almost beyond recognition.

Chewing inappropriate objects is the result of either boredom, (when the dog is hankering for something to do in her most active periods, she can't curl up with a good mystery novel or go down to the club for a quick game of racquetball) – or lack of proactive chew toy training and the lack of appropriate objects to chew. (Sometimes a dog will have been given appropriate objects to chew, but won't have been taught that those are the objects her owner would like her to chew, or won't have been taught to love to chew those objects.)

The Solution

The solution, then, is to provide the dog with some appropriate things to chew on when she gets bored, and to teach her to love to chew on those objects, rather than the couch or the dining room chair legs.

The first step is environmental enrichment – providing lots of fun and "legal" things for the dog to do when he's alone and feeling active. The best kinds of chewing objects are indestructible, hollow, and sterile, like large sterilized bones and tough rubber chew toys. These chew toys can be stuffed with treats and kibble (your dog's daily ration) making them the best available and most profitable objects to chew on in the house! To increase the value of the chew toys, you must at first feed the dog all of his daily food ration in stuffed toys. Yes, every meal! Several stuffed chew toys in the morning and evening will help the dog to settle quietly while he works for his meals (something dogs were, after all, designed to do), and, at the same time, learn to love his proper chew toys.

The easiest way to stuff chew toys is to do it in assembly line fashion: stuff enough for an entire day or two and freeze them. Stuff a bit of cheese or freeze dried liver into the small hole in the Kong or the very middle of a long, hollow bone. Then pack the rest with moistened kibble and perhaps a few treats. See Open Paw's Chew Toy Stuffing handout for more info.

Make it so that some treats will fall out easily as soon as the dog starts chewing (so that she “gets it” right away), while others are harder to remove and require more active chewing. You should show your dog what to do with the chew toy by rolling or shaking it at first so that some kibble comes out. Then praise her when she chews on the toy.

When you get home in the evening, have your dog fetch his chew toy and bring it to you, whereupon you pop the cheese or liver out of the treat. Wow! Your dog has been trying to do that all day long. Your dog will learn the thing to do is clearly to bring the treat to you when you get home: so, when your dog begins to anticipate your return, he’ll think of his chew toy and get it ready for presentation to you. This is perfect, because when he gets excited waiting for Mom or Dad to get home, he already has the appropriate excitement-relieving activity right there in his mouth.

Step two is to manage the situation until the dog has developed a full-blown chew toy addiction. (Retraining your dog to have a good chew toy habit may take several months.) Set up short term and long term confinement areas in which the only available things to chew on are the chew toys you’ve provided, stuffed with breakfast or dinner. This is a self-teaching arrangement. Once you’ve set up the environment properly, the dog will learn to love the chew toys, and to seek them out when she’s feeling active and needs something to do. A long term confinement area (mainly for pups) will have a warm and comfy bed, fresh water, a potty area (if the dog is not yet housetrained) in the furthest spot from the bed, a variety of stuffed chew toys, and a complete lack of “illegal” chew toys. A short-term confinement area will be a den (crate) or a tie down on a dog bed, provided with a stuffed chew toy to chew on. Dogs rarely chew inappropriate objects in front of their owners, but you can use the short-term confinement area occasionally so that you may witness your dog chewing her chew toy, and praise and reward her for it.

For more on long-term and short-term confinement, see our "[Errorless Housetraining](#)" [handout](#).

It’s Still Not Working?

The most likely problem is that your dog is still getting food out of a bowl. Naughty owner! Your dog should be eating only out of chew toys and as a reward in training sessions, especially while you’re trying to housetrain. Take away your dog’s food bowl and, if necessary, wait him out for a few days—eventually he’ll likely get hungry and begin to be intrigued by the chew toys. This process works faster if no other food is offered.

If you’re not feeding out of a bowl, but your dog still won’t chew her stuffed toys, try switching to a different toy. Some dogs love Kongs, the Squirrel Dude and other stuffed rubber toys, but don’t like Molecule Balls or Buster Cubes as much; other dogs are the complete opposite: loving “puzzle” toys but less interested in Kongs or Big Kahunas.

You may also be making the stuffed toy too difficult to “unpack.” If your dog is starting out, she may need an easier-to-decipher chew toy, packed with loose kibble and sweetened with something especially yummy at the end. If you’re coming home to empty chew toys but ruined shoes and furniture, on the other hand, you need to make the chew toys more challenging! Try stuffing bones into the end of the Kongs to “block” the entrance and make them more difficult to unpack, or hiding the chew toys for your dog to search out.