

Taking Control by Managing the Situation

- Take responsibility for your own belongings. If you don't want it in your dog's mouth, don't make it available. Keep clothing, shoes, books, trash, eyeglasses, and remote control devices out of your dog's reach.
- Don't confuse your dog by offering them shoes and socks as toys and then expecting them to distinguish between their shoe and yours. Your dog's toys should be clearly distinguishable from household goods.
- Until your dog learns the house rules, confine them when you're unable to keep an eye on them. Choose a "safe place" that's dog proof and provide fresh water and "safe" toys. If your dog is crate trained, you may also place them in their crate for short periods of time.
- Give your dog plenty of your time and attention. Your dog won't know how to behave if you don't teach them alternatives to inappropriate behavior, and they can't learn these when they are in the yard by themselves.
- If you catch your dog chewing on something they shouldn't, interrupt the behavior with a loud noise, offer them an acceptable chew toy instead, and praise them lavishly when they take the toy in their mouth.
- Have realistic expectations. At some point your dog will inevitably chew up something you value; this is often part of the transition to a new home. Your dog needs time to learn the house rules and you need to remember to take precautions and keep things out of their reach.

Chewing is normal behavior for curious puppies who may be teething, but adult dogs may engage in destructive chewing for any number of reasons. In order to deal with the behavior, you must first determine why your dog is chewing—and remember, they are not doing it to spite you.

Play, Boredom, or Social Isolation

Normal play behavior sometimes leads to destruction, as it may involve digging, chewing, shredding, or shaking objects. Because dogs investigate objects by pawing at them and exploring them with their mouths, they may

also inadvertently damage items in their environment. Your dog may be chewing for entertainment if:

- They are left alone for long periods without opportunities to interact with you.
- Their environment is relatively barren, lacking playmates or toys.
- They are a puppy or adolescent (under three years old) and he doesn't have other outlets for their energy.
- They are a particularly active type of dog (like the herding or sporting breeds) who needs to be occupied to be happy.

Solutions

- Play with your dog daily in a safe, fenced-in area. Playing fetch is a great way to use up your dog's excess energy without wearing you out!
- Go for a walk. Walks should be more than just "bathroom time." On-leash walks are important opportunities for you and your dog to be together. Allow time for sniffing, exploring, instruction, interaction and praise.
- Increase your dog's opportunities for mental stimulation. Teach your dog a few commands or tricks and practice them daily. Take your dog training class; not only are they fun, but such classes teach commands important for your dog's safety and give you and your dog time to work toward a common goal.
- Provide your dog with lots of appropriate toys.
- Rotate your dog's toys to refresh their interest in them. "New" toys are always more interesting than old ones.
- Try different kinds of toys, but when you introduce a new toy, keep an eye on your dog to make sure he won't tear it up and ingest the pieces.
- Consider the various types of toys that can be stuffed with food. Putting tidbits of food inside chew toys helps your dog focus on these toys rather than on unacceptable objects.

- Make your dog's favorite off-limits chew objects unattractive to them by covering them with heavy plastic, aluminum foil, hot pepper sauce, or a commercial "anti-chew" product.

- Consider a good "doggie day care" program for two or three days a week to help your dog work off some of their excess energy.

Separation Anxiety

Dogs with separation anxiety tend to display behaviors that reflect a strong attachment to their owners. This includes following you from room to room, frantic greetings, and anxious responses whenever you prepare to leave the house. Factors that can precipitate a separation anxiety problem include:

- A change in the family's schedule that leaves your dog alone more often.
- A move to a new home.
- The death or loss of a family member or another family pet.
- A period at a shelter or boarding kennel.

Again, remember that these behaviors are not motivated by spite or revenge, but by anxiety. Punishment will only make the problem worse. Separation anxiety can be resolved by using counterconditioning and desensitization techniques.

Attention-Seeking Behavior

Without realizing it, we often pay more attention to our dogs when they're misbehaving. Dogs who don't receive a lot of attention and reinforcement for appropriate behavior may engage in destructive behavior when their owners are present as a way to attract attention—even if the attention is "negative," such as a verbal scolding.

Solutions

- Make sure your dog gets a lot of positive attention every day—playtime, walks, grooming, or just petting.
- Ignore bad behavior (as much as possible) and reward good behavior. Remember to reward your dog with

praise and petting when they are playing quietly with appropriate toys.

- Make their favorite off-limits chew objects unattractive or unavailable to them. Use aversives on objects that cannot be put away.
- Teach your dog a “drop it” command, so that when they do pick up an off-limits object, you can use the command and praise them for complying. The best way to teach “drop it” is to practice exchanging a toy in their possession for a tidbit of food.
- Practice the concept of “Nothing in Life Is Free” with your dog. This gets your dog in the habit of complying with your commands and is a good way to make sure they get lots of positive attention for doing the right things.

Fears and Phobias

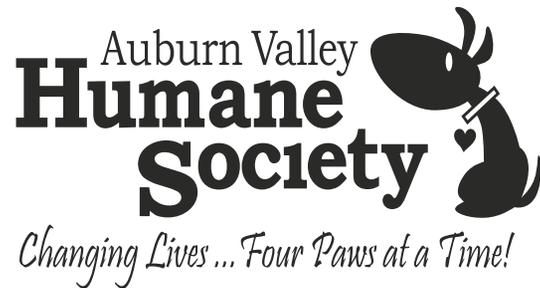
Your dog’s destructive behavior may be a response to something they fear. Some dogs are afraid of loud noises. Your dog’s destructive behavior may be caused by fear if they tend to be more destructive when they are exposed to loud noises, such as thunderstorms, firecrackers, or construction sounds, and if the primary damage is to doors, doorframes, window coverings, screens, or walls.

Solutions

- Provide a “safe place” for your dog. Find out where they like to go when they feel anxious, then allow access to that space or create a similar one for them to use when the fear stimulus is present.
- Don’t comfort your dog when they are behaving fearfully. Try to get them to play with you or respond to commands they know and give them praise and treats when they responds to you rather than the fear stimulus.
- Don’t crate your dog unless they are thoroughly crate trained and considers the crate their safe place. If you put them in a crate to prevent destruction and they are not crate trained, they may injure themselves or destroy the crate.

What NOT to Do

Punishment is rarely effective in resolving destructive behavior problems and may even make the problem worse. Never discipline your dog after the fact. If you discover your dog has chewed an item but don’t catch them in the act, it’s too late to administer a correction. Your dog doesn’t think, “I chewed those shoes an hour ago and that’s why I’m being scolded now.” People often believe their dog makes this connection because he runs and hides or “looks guilty.” But dogs display submissive postures like cowering, running away, or hiding when they feel threatened by an angry tone of voice, body posture, or facial expression. Your dog doesn’t know what they have done wrong; they only know that you’re upset. Punishment after the fact will not only fail to eliminate the undesirable behavior, but may also provoke other undesirable behaviors.



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The Auburn Valley Humane Society is dedicated to providing shelter, quality care and love for all the lost, mistreated and abandoned animals in Auburn. AVHS utilizes all available resources to ensure each animal is placed into a loving and forever home and promotes responsible pet ownership through education and outreach.

Adapted from material originally developed by applied animal behaviorists at the Dumb Friends League, Denver, Colorado.
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Dogs: Destructive Chewing



Auburn Valley Humane Society

Changing lives...

four paws at a time!