

DESTRUCTIVE CHEWING

By Terena and Nancy Thomas



Chewing is a highly enjoyable pastime for your dog. Chewing can be a frustrating and expensive problem for you. Your dog will need an investment of your energy and attention to solve this destructive problem. It will not go away on its own. The length of time that destructive behavior has been going on will determine how quickly and easily it can be corrected.

Dogs love to chew! It is a necessary canine behavior. We do not want to stop the dog from chewing. We want to stop DESTRUCTIVE chewing! The chewing must be redirected to an appropriate object.

Puppies replace teeth between 2-6 months of age. During this time the pain of teething creates the desperate need to chew. A caring owner realizes this need and will provide ONE appropriate chew toy at ALL times. A damp frozen wash cloth is a great relief for teething pain. Your pup will use it for about an hour and then it would be put away or replaced if needed. NEVER allow a puppy to chew shoes, socks, or other “human” things. Your pet can not tell the difference between an old shoe you gave him and your new \$50 pair! To a dog a shoe is a shoe!! ALWAYS PRAISE YOUR PUPPY FOR CHEWING THE RIGHT THING!! Say “Gooooood pup, get your chew toy!”

An older dog with no history of destructive chewing, that suddenly begins, may be having tooth pain. Your veterinarian can relieve this suffering for your pooch.

A need to escape from something can be a chew inducer. Stressful noises will cause some dogs to chew to escape. Fireworks, chain saws, lawn mowers, door bells, and telephone sounds can all drive your dog into a chewing frenzy. Condition your dog to as many sounds as possible when you are home. Play ball happily while your neighbor mows or chain saws so your sound sensitive dog will associate the loud noise with something fun. Sometimes a radio turned on to a calm music station (never rock or talk shows) can help mask outside noises to soothe a fearful dog. If the Fourth of July festivities panic your pooch, try to keep him with you or hire a sitter during that time. Do NOT cuddle and pet a shaking fearful dog! It encourages them to shake! Incessant phone ringing can be a worry for some dogs. An answering machine can come to the rescue for both of you!

A need to escape to something can cause chewing. An unneutered male can detect the scent of a female in season two miles away! This can cause the poor Romeo much distress. This usually results in a demolished door, gate, or carpet as he attempts to reach her. Have your male neutered promptly. This will eliminate the problem and relieve his swooning. If your dog has a desire to escape to find companionship, he is lonely! You need to take a good look at your relationship with your dog! How much time everyday do you spend playing with him? How much time everyday do you exercise him? This may be the entire problem!

Loneliness frustration is the most frequent reason for destructive behavior, especially chewing! The solution is to spend time with your dog, your gnawer will establish communication and reaffirm which of you is the “boss”. Have your dog down stay twice a day for thirty minutes (while you read, watch TV, or cook). Play ball, jog, or walk briskly with him daily. Your chewer should be exhausted whenever you leave him alone. Exercise uses that energy on something positive for you both! The six to eight hours you spend sleeping can be shared with no effort on your part. Have him sleep in your room (off the bed!). This has been the number one most effective loneliness and stress relief we have found!

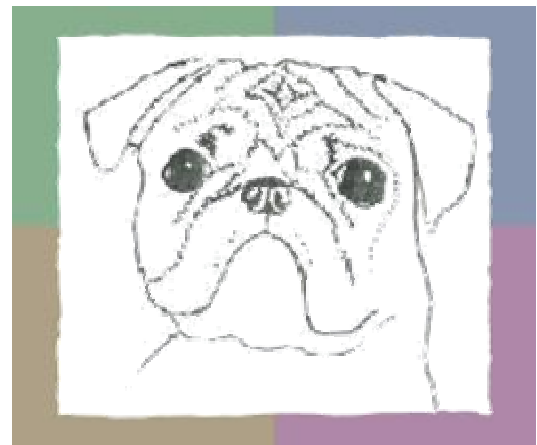
Feed your dog in the morning. Hungry dogs chew more! Dry crunchy food takes longer to eat and gives more chewing exercise. High quality food is a MUST! Dietary deficiencies cause chewing usually on walls, wood or plants. Lower protein dog food is best for dogs with too much energy.

Confinement is important for your Jaws II when you are absent or too busy to observe closely. A laundry room or bathroom with all potential targets removed and an aluminum or Plexiglas kick plate on the door works well. A crate is great if used for less than three hours at a time. This precaution will be necessary until your retraining program is complete. NEVER leave an untrained chewer alone in a loaded room!!

Retraining starts with you! Items demolished in your absence are YOUR fault! You deserve 40 lashes not the dog! Returning home to yell or “spank” the dog for chewing, teaches him to dread your return. It does NOT teach him that what he did was wrong! Delayed punishment causes severe emotional anguish and is a sure way to drive the dog crazy! Crazy dogs have even more behavior problems!

It is essential to teach your dog what you want him to do before administering any punishment. Give him a latex (never vinyl) chew toy, large rawhide bone, or a marrow bone. As he chews on it tell him he is great, wonderful and terrific! Every time he chews the correct item PRAISE, PRAISE, PRAISE!!! If he is holding the item and shredding it remove it quickly!

After he has the security of knowing he is allowed to chew certain items, you may begin to reprimand inappropriate chewing. Reprimand only when your muncher is “caught in the act”. Do it promptly with a thunderous shout! Use a single word warning like “QUIT!”



or “MINE!” or “YUK”. Always use the same warning word. After your startling shout, pause, and then intensely say “Find your chew toy, hurry, find your chew toy!” As you say this, quickly help your dog locate the chew toy. The second the dog’s mouth touches the toy burst forth with ecstatic praise!

To teach this warning word, use a slipper or other forbidden object. Wiggle it enticingly on the floor near your canine student. Do not call or encourage your dog verbally to mouth it! As soon as the chewer mouths or licks the object use your warning word loud and sharp! You may slap the slipper on the floor but not on the dog. Immediately give the dog his chew toy and praise profusely! Leave the slipper on the floor and guard it nearby. Watch and repeat this procedure several times as needed.

When you are confident your pupil understands your warning word it is time to go on to the next step. Select a room that will be easy to watch without being seen, to prepare your dog to be left alone. Gently shake cushions, drapes, electrical cords, (unplugged please) furniture and clothing that are potential targets. As you shake each target say the warning word sternly.

Do not excite or frighten the student. As a back-up, you may even wish to spray dog repellent or underarm deodorant on these targeted objects before shaking them and warning the dog. He should not see you do this spraying. Before exiting to spy on your gourmet pooch, where he can not see or hear you, use the spray from the can to startle him. Spray it quickly several times in front of his nose but NOT on him. This will help him associate the bad spray can that frightened him with the smell that it carried. This will help your dental demolitionist to keep his teeth off anything that smells like it!

As you calmly leave, give him a chew toy that you have left your scent on. Rub it for 30 seconds to leave a good scent. Tell him to “guard the house”. Shut the door and make him think you have gone (rattle keys, start the car, whatever). Sneak to your peek spot. Use strategically placed mirrors or a window to spy on your pupil. Wait for 15 minutes, return CALMLY, and tell him he is wonderful. Rub the toy, hand it to him, tell him “guard the house”, and leave as before. Always enter and leave calmly to avoid exciting the dog. This time wait and watch for 30 minutes. Quietly return as before and praise the good guy calmly. Leave for one hour, return as before. Increase the time to two hours. By this time your dog should be getting the idea. The instant your muncher mouths or licks anything in the room other than the intended chew toy, rush in with a loud thunderous “MINE!” or “QUIT”! Startle him “in the act”. Quickly take a deep breath and happily tell him to “find his chew toy” as you help locate it. Praise lots as soon as he has it! Leave calmly again and start the time over. This should also be done in the yard with the hose, laundry, furniture, etc. (wiggle, warn, watch, and wait).

The “find the chew toy game” is then used continuously whenever you return. Only pet your dog when the toy is in his mouth. Greet him calmly with never any hoopla and excitement. Soon he will begin to search for the toy on his own when he anticipates your arrival.

Booby traps are useful in some cases. A stack of empty cans strategically balanced over the trash or teething target with a string attached to some bouillon sprayed paper should startle him into avoiding that target in the future. Mousetraps set on couches or trash bins work wonders with “Snappy Trainers” attached to them. Caution: small dogs may be injured by mouse traps.

In the event that none of the above techniques work, the Canine Country School offers in house consultations which can enable you and your pooch to have custom tailored techniques as well as a set daily routine. The Canine Country School also rents out alarms which, when used correctly, can eliminate many problems for owners of chewing dogs. Call us if you need help, clarification or to schedule an appointment to use the rental alarms.

Destructive chewing can cost you lots. It can cost your dog his life! At the least it can damage his health and his home. He can be poisoned by paint or plants, electrocuted, have stomach blockage or punctures, or get splinters in gums and throat. All of this can be prevented! Start your retraining now. Remember ONE chew toy and lots of praise! Leave and return CALMLY!

**Terena Thomas, CPDT
Head Trainer
PO Box 202712
Denver, CO 80220
Phone: 970-524-TRAIN (8724)
www.caninecountryschool.com
info@caninecountryschool.com**