

Here is a question trainer hear often: Why does my dog chew up our things when he has dozens of his very own wonderful toys all over the place? The question is usually about a puppy, but it could be regarding an older dog who inexplicably got it into her head to be mischievous after months of perfect behavior.

Destructive chewing in dogs and puppies is a common behavior where a dog chews on inappropriate items that are especially appealing: eyeglasses, books, cell phones, television remotes, pillows, upholstery and your personal clothing items (e.g. socks). These items assimilate your smell which becomes irresistible to our dogs. Chewing can also be due to boredom, teething pain (in puppies), anxiety, lack of proper chew toys, or inadequate mental stimulation. It's a natural behavior that can be managed with proper training and providing appropriate chew options.

Key points about destructive chewing:

- **Normal puppy behavior:** Puppies naturally chew to explore their environment and relieve teething pain, making it important to redirect them towards appropriate chew toys.

Causes:

- **Boredom:** When dogs are left alone for extended periods without enough mental stimulation, they may resort to chewing to occupy themselves.
- **Anxiety:** Stress or separation anxiety can trigger destructive chewing.
- **Lack of training:** Not teaching a dog what is acceptable to chew on can lead to destructive behavior.
- **Dental issues:** Some dogs may chew excessively due to discomfort from dental problems.

How to address destructive chewing:

- **Provide appropriate chew toys:** Offer a variety of chew toys designed for your dog's size and chewing needs, like rubber toys, rope toys, and food-stuffed toys (e.g. Kongs).
- **Rotate toys:** Regularly switch out the toys to keep your dog's interest.
- **Supervise playtime:** Actively engage with your dog during playtime to ensure they are chewing on appropriate items.
- **Positive Reinforcement:** Praise your dog when they choose to chew on their toys and reward them with treats.
- **Redirecting:** When you catch your dog chewing something they shouldn't, use a prompting noise like "pup-pup" or "eh-eh" or teaching them to "drop it" by using a high value treat to get them to drop the item. Then redirecting them to a proper chew toy.
- **Exercise and mental stimulation:** Ensure your dog gets enough physical exercise and mental stimulation through training sessions, puzzle feeders, and interactive toys. If destructive chewing persists, consult a dog trainer or veterinarian.
- **Underlying medical issues:** Rule out any medical causes like dental problems or pain that could be contributing to the chewing behavior.
- **Training:** A professional can help identify the root cause of the behavior and develop a targeted training plan to address it.