

## **Destructive Behavior in Puppies**

Congratulations on bringing home your new puppy! A new puppy can be an exciting and rewarding experience. However, along with the fun, often come some challenges for the new owners. One such challenge is managing and controlling your puppy's destructive behaviors. This handout will provide some tips, if your puppy tends to exhibit this type of behavior.

Puppies exhibit destructive behaviors for many different reasons. Most puppies are naturally curious about their surroundings and part of their exploration process is to touch, smell and, yes, taste their new environment. In fact, this exploration is normal and even necessary for proper puppy socialization and development. Problems occur, however, when your puppy takes these natural tendencies to the next level and becomes destructive in his behavior. These destructive behaviors may originate for many different reasons. Some small puppies may be trying to satisfy a natural urge to chew or teethe. Other puppies that tear up items, such as magazines, trash or carpets, may be simply playing. Puppies who become anxious when separated from their family members may also exhibit a wide variety of destructive behaviors.

The first step to eliminating destructive behaviors in your puppy is to determine the main cause of the behavior. If your pet destroys a wide variety of items throughout the house at different times of day, then the dog is probably exhibiting play behaviors. If the dog only destroys items when you are separated from him, then your pet is probably experiencing separation anxiety. If your puppy is between three to six months of age and is exhibiting new destructive chewing behaviors, then he is probably beginning to teethe and looking to soothe his sore teeth and gums.

With each of these types of behaviors, it is important to analyze your behavior as well to determine if you are inadvertently rewarding the behavior in a way. For example, you catch your pet chewing on an inappropriate object and in order to distract him from the object you give him a treat. Repeating this action will solidify in your pet's mind that chewing equals receiving a treat and, therefore, the pet will chew more frequently.

After determining the cause of your pet's destructive behavior, steps may then be taken to eliminate the behavior. The first steps should be ones that re-direct the pet's attention to proper and appropriate chewing and play behaviors. For the pet exhibiting destructive play behaviors, this redirection may include more proper play times, exercise, training, and new appropriate toys. These new toys should have a variety of tastes, textures, sounds and odors in order to stimulate your pet and redirect their attention. One such example are the many good puzzle toys on the market today that allow you to stuff the toy with treats and allow your pet to work for its reward.

If your pet is exhibiting teething behaviors, redirect its attention to appropriate outlets by providing toys with a variety of textures. It may also be good to offer toys that have been cooled in the freezer or toys that have frozen treats inside to ease the puppy's gums. For the puppy that is experiencing separation anxiety it may be necessary to confine the animal in an area where it will not damage items while you are away. If the pup is confined, be sure to provide new and interesting toys and treats to distract the pup from your departure and separation.

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If directing your puppy's attention away from destructive chewing and toward appropriate areas has not worked then it may be necessary to discipline your pet. Discipline should be swift, humane and should occur at the time of the offense. If possible, it is recommended to use a punishment that will not be associated with the punisher, for example, a spray bottle, noise gun, citronella spray collar or clap. If you cannot confine your pet away from the area while you are not present to supervise, then it may be necessary to deter your pet by placing a booby trap. One idea is to place items that will make a loud noise and movement on or near the area so that when your pet touches or chews he will be greeted with a loud crash and flourish of movement. This attack will frequently deter your pet from further chewing.

