

My dog chews on EVERYTHING! What can I do?:

Chewing is a natural behavior for dogs. Some dogs chew because it feels good, some because they are anxious and others because they are bored. Chewing is essential to the mental health of your dog and it can actually reduce tartar build up if he is given correct items to chew. The key to retraining a chewer is to set them up for success. Use the formula below to help you:

1. Crate train so the dog is either crated or closely supervised 100% when indoors. He should never have the opportunity to chew the wrong item as you are watching him when out of the crate. When you cannot watch him, he goes into the crate with a chewy or stuffed KONG. See our handout on crate training for more information.
2. More daily aerobic exercise- walking a couple of times a week is not enough exercise. He needs daily running exercise- fetch, bubbles, Frisbee, swimming, etc. A tired dog sleeps, and is less likely to chew. See our handout on play and exercise for more information.
3. Give the dog something that he CAN chew on (a stuffed KONG, Nylabones, Buster Cubes, natural bones etc.) and then PRAISE the dog for chewing on those items. We always recommend stuffing the KONG with such tasty treats as cheese, peanut butter, leftover chicken, steak, or some canned wet food. The idea is to make the correct chewing item much more appealing than anything else. Do not give pig's ears or flimsy rawhide as these are snacks and will not last long enough to provide chewing satisfaction.
4. Spray areas that the dog has targeted (chewed) with a bitter tasting deterrent, such as Bitter Apple. Renew the area daily for the next two weeks until he stops going back for a taste chew. Remember that you should be closely supervising the dog during this retraining phase; don't rely on the taste deterrents alone to fix this problem!
5. Do not punish the dog if he is chewing the wrong thing. Punishment can cause the dog to be aggressive to you and start to guard ANY object he has. Instead, call the dog away from the item and reward him for coming to you with a food treat. Remove the forbidden item without yelling or scolding and then supervise him more closely so he does not have the opportunity to chew on the wrong thing again.
6. Leave a leash on him when loose in the house so you can gently keep him with you and he can't sneak off to chew something. Put up baby gates so his access is limited in the house or try tie down training. See our handout on tie downs for more information.
7. Hire a positive, private trainer to help you teach OFF or LEAVE IT .Training establishes a common language between you and your dog thus increasing your communication and bond. We recommend that all dogs, regardless of their owner's knowledge or skill, attend at least one positive, humane training course in their life. To learn more about training programs at HSSV, visit www.hssv.org/training.
8. Notice and reward good behavior. When he is chewing on his own things, praise him and pet him. When he is quietly lying at your feet, praise him softly and feed him a treat. Notice the good behaviors your dog does every day and reward it. If you keep rewarding good behavior, it will increase and in turn the bad behaviors will have to decrease. If the dog is not rewarded for appropriate or correct behavior, then he will device his own games and as you have found out, you won't like the games he picks to play.

9. Supervise, supervise, supervise and again we can't say it enough, supervise your pet. Your dog should NOT have one opportunity to chew the wrong item because you are watching him closely when he is loose in your house OR he is crated indoors with an item he can chew. We want to set him up for success rather than failure. Don't leave items out in easy reach for him; put away shoes, trash cans, clothing, children's toys, etc. In order to help change your pet's behavior, you also must change your behavior as well.
10. Avoid isolating the dog outdoors. This teaches him nothing except to become anxious and chew the yard up. See our handout on the Backyard Dog for more information.
11. Do remember that young dogs are more prone to chewing and require much higher amounts of exercise than older animals. Do make sure you are not setting your young dog up for failure by leaving him unattended at too young of an age. The general rule of thumb is that the dog should start with small amounts (15-20 minutes) of unattended freedom indoors around the age of one year and gradually work up to longer periods over the next 6 months. Some dogs only chew when left alone which can be reflective of separation anxiety. See our handout on separation anxiety for more information.