



# Excessive Chewing and Puppy Biting

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It's not uncommon for dogs to enjoy chewing on different objects, regardless of whether it's something they should be chewing on; all dogs have the natural instinct to chew. Dogs chew on things for different reasons. Some of these reasons include: they're bored, they're panicking due to separation anxiety, they're teething, they're exploring the world around them, they're hungry, or they just naturally enjoy chewing as a daily activity. It's our responsibility as their owners to try to figure out why they're chewing and ensure they have appropriate items to chew on. Below is some additional information about how to manage a dog that likes to chew a lot:

- Puppies go through two teething phases, one when their puppy teeth, or milk teeth, start to come in at about 3 weeks old, and the second when their adult teeth start to come in at about 3 months old. It's not uncommon for young adult dogs up to two years of age to continue to want to chew a lot into their "teenage" phase, even though they are no longer teething.
- Generally speaking, younger dogs have a lot more energy than older dogs, so as a result, they are much more active and need to be given constructive outlets to burn off all that energy. If they're not given the appropriate exercise and mental stimulation for their age and breed, young dogs can become very destructive in your home. It's imperative that you make the time to exercise your young dog and train your young dog in basic obedience behaviors so that they learn some manners, while also giving them appropriate chew bones and toys. All in all, a tired dog is a good dog.
- Puppies that excessively nip and mouth at their owner's hands, arms, legs, and clothing are doing so because they want your attention to play and to explore the world around them. They don't have hands to grasp and pick things up like humans, so they have to use their mouths instead. Getting your puppy enrolled in a puppy class so they can socialize and learn how to play with other puppies will help them learn bite inhibition. Bite inhibition is when dogs learn how hard they should and shouldn't bite with their mouths while interacting with other dogs. This knowledge will also transfer to people, but these young puppies often still have sharp puppy teeth that hurt and scrape our skin more than what might bother another dog.
- Teaching your puppy not to bite you to get your attention can be handled in a few ways:
  - While enrolled in a puppy class, you will learn how to teach your puppy some basic obedience behaviors, such as Sit, Down, Come, and Look. All of these trained behaviors can be combined in various ways to teach your puppy how to get your attention in a more appropriate manner. Ask your puppy for a calm Sit and Look when they are about to get rowdy but BEFORE your puppy starts to nip so that you can substitute the more appropriate sitting behavior in place of the jumping and nipping. Have a treat nearby to reinforce this more suitable behavior.
  - You can also redirect their excited nipping and biting by offering them a plush toy to shake and squeak or an antler to focus chewing on. Offering them a toy or a bone will not

accidentally reinforce their rowdy puppy behavior; puppies will always be rambunctious, but it will teach them what objects they can channel their rambunctious puppy energy toward.

- Get your puppy outside and exercising: Take your puppy for a long walk, teach them how to fetch a toy, chase them around the yard, or try doggie daycare if you can't seem to find the time to exercise your puppy. Don't get frustrated with your energetic puppy if you aren't exercising them appropriately for their age and breed. When you come home from a long day of work they're going to want to play, not relax on the couch. Hire a midday dog walker if needed. A tired dog is a good dog.
- If the three options above are not working and your puppy is still biting or nipping at you excessively, then your puppy may be too wound up and may need some down time in a crate or a puppy-proof room to cool down away from you. If you're giving a puppy a timeout in their kennel, it should not last longer than 5-20 minutes. Any longer and they will not be able to associate what they were doing previously with being in the crate. See the crate training handout.
- Always supervise young dogs and puppies to ensure they are not chewing on inappropriate objects and to ensure they are not choking and/or ingesting parts of the toys you've given them to play with and chew on. Baby gates, crates, or keeping your dog on a leash tied to your belt are all good tools for total supervision until you get to know your dog and his or her chewing habits. Not all dogs can play with the same toys safely, so it's imperative that you monitor your dog when you give them a new toy or bone for the first time. Ingested toys can cause serious, life-threatening intestinal blockages, and the surgery alone to remove the blockage is invasive, isn't always successful, and can cost a few thousand dollars at a veterinarian.
- You can ensure that your dog is not chewing on inappropriate objects by keeping your personal items picked up and put away. All garbage cans need to be in secure areas that your dog can't get to. Also make sure that rooms are safe for your dog (i.e., dog proof) and that things like plugged-in power cords are out of your dog's reach. Closing doors to extra rooms like bedrooms and bathrooms will ensure that your dog is not sneaking off and chewing on your things or harming itself. Remind your children that it is their responsibility to keep their items like toys and shoes put away if they don't want them chewed on by the dog. It's not uncommon for dogs of any age to want to chew things that smell strongly of their owners like dirty socks, underwear, shoes, etc., so make sure they are all out of your dog's reach.
- If your dog is chewing on an inappropriate item, redirect their chewing to their dog toys and bones instead of scolding them. Scolding them will not diminish their need to chew and their need to do something mentally stimulating; it will just teach your dog to fear you. Instead, teach them what they should be doing by offering them toys or chews that they *should* chew on. See the list below of toys recommended for excessive chewers.
- If your dog is chewing on larger items that you can't put away like furniture, you may want to try a taste-deterrent spray like bitter apple spray. However, the best option is always going to be supervising your dog when you're home and then redirecting them to an appropriate toy when they feel the need to chew on something they shouldn't. If you're not home to supervise, then you may need to crate-train your dog or baby gate them in a dog-proof room like a kitchen or bathroom. Some people can safely give their dogs toys to chew on while they are away while others cannot because their dog may have a history of ingesting or choking on toys.

- If your dog is excessively chewing when you are not home and is doing things like escaping out of its metal or plastic crate and then chewing up carpets, doors, or the molding around your doors or windows, you most likely have a dog that is suffering from separation anxiety and should seek immediate help from your veterinarian and a behaviorist. Please see our separation anxiety handout. Your dog is experiencing extreme mental and emotional distress, akin to a panic attack. Do not continue to try to crate your dog; your dog may severely injure its body or teeth while trying to escape out of a crate.

### Recommended dog toys for excessive chewers\*:

- Kongs stuffed with peanut butter or wet dog food (freezing them makes it last longer)
- Himalayan Chews
- Goughnuts
- Nylabones
- Wholesome rolled rawhide bones
- Deer, moose, or elk antlers
- Bull horns
- Bully sticks
- Rope toys
- Tuffy plush toys
- Leather toys
- Red Barn or Merrick marrow bones

\*Items above are generally safer if they are made in the USA compared to products shipped in from overseas, particularly animal products such as rawhides and marrow bones. Wayside Waifs does not receive any financial reimbursement for endorsing these products. Wayside Waifs can also not be held liable should your dog have problems while interacting with these toys.

***If, after trying these suggestions, you are still experiencing undesirable behaviors in your dog, SUBMIT QUESTIONS by clicking the link under Ask A Trainer on the Behavior and Training page of the Wayside Waifs website: [www.waysidewaifs.org](http://www.waysidewaifs.org).***

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### Additional tips and resources:

<http://www.aspca.org/pet-care/virtual-pet-behaviorist/dog-behavior/destructive-chewing>  
<http://www.aspca.org/pet-care/virtual-pet-behaviorist/dog-behavior/puppy-mouthing>  
<http://www.aspca.org/pet-care/virtual-pet-behaviorist/dog-behavior/pica-eating-things-arent-food>  
<http://www.aspca.org/pet-care/virtual-pet-behaviorist/dog-behavior/using-taste-deterrents>  
<http://www.aspca.org/pet-care/virtual-pet-behaviorist/dog-behavior/counter-surfing-and-garbage-raiding>