

Puppy Biting & Chewing

Why do puppies spend so much time chewing on us & our things? Well, there are several reasons, actually. First of all, munching on things is normal puppy behavior - they have a very strong need to chew. Problems usually result when they aren't taught limits on chewing on people, when they aren't given enough exercise, and when they have too much access to the household.

Let's first address the most painful type of chewing... when puppies use us as their personal teethers. When puppies are very young, they experiment with their world & learn what they can & can't do. They start out chewing their mothers and their siblings. However, just as we humans tolerate behavior in babies that we don't in older children, the mothers tire of this as the puppies grow older & teach them to stop. Unfortunately, many times the puppies are sold before the mother has had a chance to really teach them about bite inhibition. Puppies aren't born knowing that biting hurts. They need to learn how just much pressure with those little needle teeth is too much! The situation is usually worse in pups that are taken from the litter before they are 8 weeks old, which doesn't give the mother and the other puppies a chance to finish their job. Then the humans who adopt or buy the puppies will have to take care of it.

FIRST, realize that puppies do have a need to chew - especially when they are teething. But they must be taught what is appropriate for them to chew on... and what is not! Be sure to supply your puppy with appropriate things. Best bet is a real, raw bone, which you can get from your local butcher or grocery store. It's even tastier if it has bits of meat left on it! Puppies can usually handle the raw meat, but people can't so these are best enjoyed outside or in the pup's crate. Be careful if you give your puppy rawhide bones. If you do, be sure they are cured without chemicals (if the advertising doesn't say, then assume chemicals are used) and watch to be sure your dog doesn't eat these too quickly, tearing off large chunks or strips & then choking. Giving your pup real bones is a lot safer. Best bet is to make sure the chew toys you provide are really great! Far better than any human skin, or wooden table leg, or throw pillow, or plant... You can make a great chew toy by taking a Kong toy or a sterilized bone and filling the middle with something delicious. Treats jammed in there, to be worked out one at a time, or the entire insides smeared with peanut butter or cheese spread can keep a puppy entertained & happy for hours! You can also buy a product such as the Buster Cube where treats or kibble can be worked out throughout the day. This kind of chew toy is mentally stimulating as well. Also a good idea is to just leave a couple of toys out for your dog. Too many become boring. You can have many different kinds - just rotate which ones you have out each day! My current favorites are the various animal parts begin sold, such as pig ears & bullysticks.

SECOND, think about how you can teach your puppy to stop biting you. To start out, do what his litter mates and mamma would have done. Tolerate him nibbling on you (so he can learn bite inhibition), but as soon as he bites you hard enough to hurt, react at first by yelping and then walking away. Start ignoring behaviors you don't like (and encouraging behaviors you do!) If he continues to try to chomp on you, then ignore him completely - by putting him in a puppy "Time out." Leave the room (if someone is still there to supervise him) or take him & very matter-of-factly put him in his crate. Unless you get nasty about it (which I am not advising) he shouldn't begin to resent his crate over this. Leave him there for a few minutes to think about why he was just excluded from the pack. Of course, he's really likely to whine, cry, & bark. Be sure NOT to let him out while he is doing any of that... unless you want to encourage that behavior! Just wait for a brief pause in the noise, then walk back in quickly, praise him for being quiet & let him out to rejoin his "pack." All is forgiven, after all... he is just a baby! This will likely need to be repeated time & time again before it sinks in. Another thing to try, as well, is to redirect his interests into something more appropriate when he begins his puppy biting. Toss a ball for him, give him a proper chew toy, etc. This works as well for puppies as it does toddlers!

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*using positive methods to teach people how to teach their pets!