



Destructive Dogs

From de-stuffing the sofa to teeth marks on the table, a destructive dog can be frustrating to live with, not to mention expensive! But don't worry, with appropriate management and guidance we can teach our dogs not to destroy our valuable possessions.

Safety first!

Book a veterinary health check to make sure there isn't a medical cause that might need treatment, such as toothache, especially if there has been a sudden change in your dog's behaviour.

Dogs can sometimes be destructive as a way of coping when they are worried, stressed or frightened – just like humans who bite their nails. If this is the case, your veterinary surgeon can refer you to a behaviourist for professional guidance, however meanwhile try to avoid all the situations that cause your dog to become destructive.

It's normal behaviour! We need to teach our dogs what they should and shouldn't chew!

All healthy puppies will use their mouths to explore their environment, so as strange as it sounds, puppy owners can help by 'puppy-proofing' the home. This means getting onto hands and knees to view the home from the puppy's perspective and tidying away safely anything that a puppy might find enticing! It's also useful with older dog's too!

Chewing is a naturally enjoyable behaviour so make sure your dog has plenty of safe and appropriate items to gnaw available, such as their own toys and chews, made from a variety of textures and materials.

Reward your dog when they choose to chew their own things, instead of yours. You could get involved in a game with their toys, talk to them and give them your attention, or if they're eating a chew you could always add to their enjoyment by giving them a few more treats as well!

All dogs need mental exercise as well as physical, so walks alone might not be enough to meet your dog's activity needs. Just how much will depend on their age, type and health, but a tired, content dog is less likely to be destructive through boredom. Our **enrichment** hand-out offers lots of fun ways to engage your dog and give them a mental workout, something different every day of the week!

Think about how you react if your dog starts chewing something that belongs to you!

Take care not to tell your dog off or to grab the item away from them because you risk making them worried about you and your relationship with them! It's hard not to get angry, because it can be very annoying, however it doesn't teach your dog anything about how you would prefer them to behave.

Resist the urge to immediately jump up and start chasing your dog to grab the item back. This could easily become an exciting game for them and an easy way to get your attention. Your dog might then be encouraged to do it again and again, if they enjoy trying to keep hold of the item.

Some dogs might feel they need to guard the items they have run off with because they are worried, we will always take them away. Chasing your dog might also make them feel that the item is much more valuable, because you want it too – so they won't want to let go of it!

What to do if your dog is chewing something you don't want them to Chew

Don't panic, stay calm and simply create a distraction, but one that does not involve looking at them, talking to them, approaching them or touching them so that you are not giving them any attention.

Create a distraction by picking up an item you are happy for your dog to have, a favourite toy or a chew, and start to interact with it yourself, turning it over in your hands, throwing it up and down, and playing with it while ignoring your dog. They are likely to become interested in what you are doing, because it looks like much more fun than what they are doing by themselves.

Your dog now has a choice – carry on all by themselves with absolutely no attention from you, or to come and join in with all the fun that you are having, which should be by far the better option! When they come over to you, encourage them to interact with their own things. Then you can calmly collect your own items.

You could also try walking out of the room for example, as they may well stop what they are doing in order to follow you. Then make sure you reward them and give them an appropriate item to chew on.

Top Training Tip

By providing suitable and better alternatives, and rewarding your dog for making good choices, you can direct their destructive urges into much more appropriate activity!

Dogs Trust provide lifelong behavioural support for all our adopted dogs.

If you need help for your Dogs Trust Dog please email: reception@dogstrust.ie

For more information about Dogs Trust, to make a donation or help us in our campaigns please call 01 879 1000, write to: Dogs Trust, Ashbourne Road, Finglas, Dublin 11 or visit www.dogstrust.ie