

Chewing is another example of natural dog behaviour that can be problematic for humans. It is, however, a very important behavioural need for most dogs. What is the best way to teach a dog to chew the right things?

PUPPIES

Puppies cannot be expected to know what they can and cannot chew. For them, the world is a place to explore and they often do this with their mouths. This is why it is important to confine your puppy to a safe puppy-proofed area when you are not at home or at night. You will also need to supply some good chew toys and bones for him to work on. If your puppy really needs to work his jaws you can also feed him using a Kong. When you are at home and your puppy is out of his safe area and exploring the environment, management is the key. If you do not want him to chew important objects such as clothing, tissues, toilet rolls, towels and shoes, put them out of your puppy's reach. If your puppy does get hold of an important object, you can manage the situation by trading the object for a favourite dog toy, bone or treat. In the long run it is better to teach your puppy a "Leave" and a "Drop" command.

HOW TO TEACH "LEAVE"

Put a treat in your hand. Make a fist with your hand, say "Leave" and offer your hand to your puppy. It is very likely that he will immediately start to lick and pester your fist with the treat inside. As soon as he stops, say "Take it", open your hand and give him the treat. Repeat until you are confident of success and then progress to saying "Leave" and putting the treat on the ground in front of the puppy. As time goes on you can introduce different objects and do the same procedure.

HOW TO TEACH "DROP"

Start off by using a very unexciting object. A rolled up piece of cardboard can work although you may need to "test drive" a few things to find out what doesn't hold much interest for your puppy. Tell your puppy to "Take it" and offer the object. Keep holding the object as your puppy takes it in his mouth, and then give the cue "Drop". If your puppy "drops", praise and treat. If you find that he is holding on, try not to wrestle with him. Offer the object very quickly and remove it almost as soon as he puts it in his mouth. Praise and reward him when he lets go of the object. Repeat until your puppy is obeying the command well. Only move up to more interesting, higher value items to practice on when you are sure your puppy is ready.

ADULT DOGS

If a mature or adolescent dog has had guidance, he may target bones and chew toys by himself. If you are bringing home a dog with an unknown "chew history" it is wise to confine him when you are out, or at night (with toys and bones to occupy him) until you are sure he has good house manners. Using a food-filled Kong as a way of feeding is also a good way to occupy your dog and satisfy his need to chew (see our handout on Kong stuffing).

*Remember, a dog of any age can find certain objects very tempting. If you know your dog cannot resist a certain item, "manage" the situation by putting it out of reach. You can also work on training "Leave" and "Drop" as a back-up. 🐾

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