

Chew Training

We know from evolutionary science that dogs chew to tone their jaw muscles. Once, splitting bones and grinding down marrow was necessary to survive. That's no longer the case, but the urge lives on—stronger in some dogs than in others. How often dogs chew and what they chew fall under individual taste. What is certain is that chewing is normal and healthy, not a behavior problem. But it can still be a problem—for you and your furniture. Here's how to train your dog to chew the right things:

Step 1. Prevent mistakes. When you can't supervise, put your dog in her doggy-proof area with a sanctioned chewie.

Step 2. Teach good chewing choices. Audition a range of chewies until you find the ones that most appeal to your dog. Dogs have texture preferences, so try to match what yours like. If she is attacking the couch pillows, try giving her plush toys. If she is eyeing the table leg, try a hard chew. Praise liberally when your dog chews something allowed.

Step 3. Interrupt mistakes. If your dog tries to chew the wrong thing, interrupt and trade her for something she *can* chew on. Praise liberally when she does.

Step 4. Repeat if needed. If mistakes happen a lot, revisit step 1. Go back to using the doggy-proof area until your dog is consistently making better chewing choices.

A note about puppies: They chew more, yes. But don't be fooled. Chewing isn't a phase and it won't stop when your puppy grows up, so you need to teach her what's okay to chew. Give her plenty of appropriate things to chew right away to get her hooked on those instead of your shoes. This goes for newly adopted dogs, too.