

Inappropriate Chewing and Separation Anxiety

Basic Canine Education



CARE SHEET

Developed with and approved by a Qualified Veterinarian

Training a pet takes time, understanding, patience and consistency. Here are a few of the more common training challenges dog owners face, and some suggestions for working with them.

How training works

Dogs are pack animals, and as such are only comfortable when their role within the pack has been established. An established role allows the dog to predict the reactions and needs of the rest of his pack. Without a confirmed, consistent role, the dog never knows when punishment or rewards will occur, and will spend most of the time anxious and worried.

Basic obedience helps to establish the owner in role of pack leader, and lays down clear behavior guidelines that the pack can follow. The lack of a clear pack leader will cause anxiety, since only a strong and definite pack leader can protect the pack and provide it with whatever is needed. If none of the humans take this role, the dog is forced to attempt to assume it himself, since the pack **must** have a leader. The pack leader controls where the pack goes, when and what the pack eats and how the pack behaves toward one another. Having these clear guidelines allows the dog to relax, since he knows what behaviors earn what types of attention.

Most trainers follow the 3 second rule in training. Dogs will attribute positive or negative attention to whatever was happening within the 3 seconds immediately before the attention was given. Be careful to only give your dog attention when appropriate, when current behavior, not past, deserves it. If your dog is growling at strangers, don't reward the behavior by attempting to calm him. This merely reinforces that there must be something scary happening. Instead, a gentle "no", and a friendly greeting of the stranger on your part will be more reassuring to the dog than your calming attempts.

Inappropriate Chewing

All dogs love to chew. It is as natural as barking or digging. Puppies, like young children, explore the world with their mouths. Dogs between six months and one year old are getting their adult teeth, and chew to relieve teething pain and itching gums. Adult dogs chew for a variety of reasons: out of boredom, loneliness, or just because it's fun.

Teaching your dog to gnaw on appropriate items, while preventing him from inflicting serious damage on your home, can protect both your dog and your possessions.

When you catch your pooch in the act, take the item away. Teach him to bring things to you and reward him for that. If you yell and chase him, it will become a game of keep-away. Give him something he's allowed to chew on instead. Praise when he starts to chew on the proper toy.

He may chew out of anxiety while you are gone, choosing something with your scent on it, like the couch. When you leave, put something with your scent on it, like a t-shirt you've slept in, on the floor or in his crate for him to lie on. Crate him when you aren't able to supervise his activity. Have special chew treats he only gets when he is in his crate.

There is no point in punishing the dog once the damage is done. He may have done it hours ago, and have no idea what you are so upset about. He'll learn that when you come home you are mad, and he'll start cowering and looking guilty even when he hasn't done anything wrong.

Be sure your dog gets adequate exercise every day, and plenty of time with you, even if it is just lying at your feet. Boredom, loneliness, and excess energy often trigger destructive chewing. Keep a regular routine. Try to come home at the same time every evening, feed near the same time, etc. The stress of hunger or not knowing when you'll be back can trigger chewing.

Bitter apple, pepper juice, or lemon juice sprayed on inappropriate plants or other chewable items will deter his urge to chew them. Provide him with lots of acceptable chew toys. Try rotating his chew toys, to keep interest high.

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Separation Anxiety Does your dog hate to be left alone? Is he frantic to get to you when left outside? Are you unable to leave him alone in another room? In the car? Separation anxiety is an emotional disturbance where the dog is frantic when left alone, even for short periods.

Owners sometimes accidentally train their pet to be anxious. They over-nurture him with constant physical contact and conversation until he is unable to stand being alone. A dog that gets constant attention is unable to cope when you leave to go to work or the store.

Start to wean your dog from constant attention by limiting physical contact. Don't sit and absentmindedly pet him. Make him earn your attention. Don't let him lie on your feet or lean on you. Gradually teach him to sit happily across the room from you. You may have to tie him to a doorknob initially. The first few minutes will be the worst, so try to keep him busy with a favorite chew toy or treat.

Teach him to relax alone. Put him in a room where he is comfortable. If he starts to whine or scratch, throw a bean bag at the closed door to startle him. You don't want him to associate the noise with you, so be quiet. When he is quiet for a few seconds, let him out and ignore him for the first minute or two. Repeat the exercise, gradually working up from a few seconds to several minutes.

Is the dog sleeping in your bed? Teach him to sleep on the floor by tying his leash to a dresser leg. You are still right there, just not touching him every second. As he gets used to this, put up a pet gate, and let him sleep just outside the doorway. As he gets used to less physical contact he will become more self-reliant.

Crate train your dog so he will be in a safe confined place while you are gone. He won't feel responsible for the entire house and can relax. Start by teaching him to be in the crate while you are there, while you come and go from the room many times.

When you leave or come home, don't make a big fuss over your dog. Ignore him until he calms down, then a quiet hello and a brief pat will do. When you leave, just go, no good-bye or anything. Practice going through your getting-ready-to-leave routine without going anywhere. Pick up your keys, your purse, your jacket, etc., and ignore the dog. Walk to the door and then turn and come right back in, ignoring him. Soon those visual cues will not have meaning and he will not react to them.

Leave on a TV or radio so the house doesn't seem so empty. A recording with your voice on it sometimes helps, too. Canine education classes will also improve your dog's confidence.

If all else fails, ask your veterinarian about medicating your dog while he gets used to spending time alone. Sometimes just one tranquilizer one time is all it takes. Or your dog may have to take calming medication for several months. There are several drugs available that specifically treat anxiety in dogs.

Give the solutions presented here plenty of time to work. It takes several weeks for a dog to learn a new behavior pattern and make it a habit. A few weeks invested in training will result in many happy years with your well-adjusted companion!

Sources *How to Raise a Puppy You Can Live With* by Clarice Rutherford & David H. Neil
Choosing a Dog for Life by Andrew De Prisco, et al
Dog Training in 10 Minutes by Carol Lea Benjamin

Note: The information on this Care Sheet is not a substitute for veterinary care. If you need additional information, please refer to the above sources or contact your veterinarian as appropriate.