

How to avoid problems with your pup

Disciplining a pup

Young dogs begin to explore their surroundings as soon as their eyes open. Mouthing, chewing and biting objects is a part of this exploration; however, it can result in injury to your pet and damage of valuable household items.

To be effective, punishment must be timed correctly and must be appropriate. There is no sense in punishing a puppy hours or days after it has chewed up a valuable item. Unless your pet is caught "in the act" or only seconds after it has chewed an inappropriate item, punishment will accomplish little. Your pet cannot make a logical connection between your reprimand and its chewing behavior unless punishment is given during or immediately after chewing.

If you return home to find that your pet has damaged something, accept the fact and ignore your pet until you have cleaned up the mess. Yelling and hitting the pup with a rolled-up newspaper are not only harsh and unkind but ineffective.

Punishment should serve to startle your pet, distracting it from its current objectionable pursuit long enough for it to detect your displeasure. Substitute the objectionable activity (chewing) immediately with an alternative and acceptable activity. If your puppy is chewing on your slippers, for example, say "no" in a firm tone and gently remove the slipper (without playing tug of war). Follow this immediately with an acceptable toy or rawhide bone and immediate praise ("good dog").

Unacceptable Behaviour

Most pets quickly discover they will be rewarded with your attention when they misbehave. A dog lying quietly in a corner is frequently ignored, but you become upset when it chews on your expensive new shoes. The dog may overlook the fact that you are unhappy about its behavior and focus on the discovery of how effectively it attracted your attention. A dog that does not have enough positive interaction with its owner may resort to objectionable attention-seeking behavior.

Young pets learn to distinguish acceptable and unacceptable behavior. If your dog has discovered how to get your attention by behaving destructively, consider how to undo the undesirable pattern you have helped create. If your dog has learned that you will chase it when it has grabbed your glove, for example, do not chase the dog the next time it tries this. Your dog will not care whether you are laughing or shouting angrily, as long as you engage in the game. Instead, ignore the dog, as difficult as this may be.

Do not make eye contact, move toward or look at your pet. Avoid giving any type of attention. If you must, leave the room. This response will be unexpected and completely contrary to what your pet desires. The dog may even abandon the object and come in search of you (if so, give the dog abundant praise).

Destructive behaviour due to loneliness and Separation Anxiety

Dogs bond emotionally to their human caretakers and can experience emotional distress at any age when separated from you or other family members. Separation anxiety may take several forms.

Separation anxiety may be seen as whimpering, barking, howling, chewing, scratching and inappropriate elimination (urine or stool). It may also be expressed as depression (loss of appetite, social withdrawal, decreased overall activity) or self-mutilation (over-grooming).

Anxiety may result when an individual experiences social isolation or even temporary separation from others. This anxiety can become particularly intense when the pet anticipates periods of separation.

Dogs are quick to learn when their owners are about to leave the house. Emotional tension builds before your departure. Peak anxiety, expressed as whimpering, barking or howling, likely occurs within the first minutes after your departure. During extended periods of separation, the pet may engage in more passive displays of anxiety, such as depression, withdrawal or self-mutilation.

Behavior modification techniques can be used to minimize separation anxiety. Begin by leaving your dog for very short periods, and lavish praise when you return. Gradually increase the time spent away. Crate training is also extremely helpful in providing security for the anxious dog. When necessary, anxiolytic herbs or drugs will be prescribed by your veterinarian to help your dog.

Chewing and Biting

Do you have a puppy that would rather use your arm than a bone as a chew toy? While it is normal for puppies to use their mouths when playing with each other; this behavior becomes a problem when it carries over into their interactions with us.

Many breeds are genetically inclined to use their mouths to do a job. The sporting breeds are the retrievers and the carriers of items. The working breeds use their mouths to control the movements of humans or other animals. Understanding these tendencies in your own puppy, can help in dealing with the problem of mouthing.

At a very young age puppies begin to learn how much pressure with their mouths is too much by the reactions of their mothers and littermates. When puppies play, they chomp each other's ears and chew each other's necks, until one bites down too hard. Then, the bitten puppy lets out a piercing "iey, iey, ieeyyy" (referred to as the hurt puppy noise), gets up and walks away.

This teaches the biting puppy that when it is too rough, play ends. Since dogs are social animals, this in itself is a correction. The puppy learns bite inhibition through these playfighting sessions, by remaining with its litter until seven weeks old. This is one of the most important lessons they will carry into adulthood, especially in their relationship with people.

Correcting your pup

As a new puppy owner, it is necessary to establish what is and isn't acceptable behavior, from the first day. Most puppies will do anything to please you and will benefit from expectations that are consistently displayed. Puppies teethe from four to six months, so mouthing is quite common then. If not gotten under control by the time the-puppy enters adolescence, not only

will you have a less cooperative teenager to handle, but also a larger, stronger jaw to deal with. Mouthing can become a way for puppies to try to control you, allowing them to take that first step towards assuming a leadership role within your home. The following techniques are recommended for most puppies up to four months of age, depending upon their size.

Initially, a puppy will use his mouth to investigate his environment. Throughout the teething process, it gives a puppy relief to chew on all manner of items, soft and hard. Providing appropriate items for your puppy to focus on can sometimes be a simple way of solving a mouthing problem. Indestructible chew toys like large nylon bones or hard rubber Kongs can provide a positive outlet for mouthing. Large rawhide bones (for when the puppy is supervised only) and carrots can be placed in the freezer and given to a teething puppy. Braided fiber bones dipped in chicken broth or water and then frozen are also a good option. If your puppy is chewing on you, the moment the pressure increases use your "hurt puppy" noise leaving your hand in his mouth. Once the pressure is released, slowly remove your hand. You may wish to offer the back of your hand for your puppy to lick. By doing this, not only are you teaching him that our skin is tender, but also that you expect a sign of deference (licking your hand) for their action. Praise him in a calm manner if his cooperation is immediate and offer him an appropriate chew toy. Do not offer a toy while your hand is still in his mouth, or you will be rewarding the wrong behavior. You may also choose to assign a command like "no bite" or "no mouth", so he will associate his behavior with your correction. This method should work with the average, eager-to-please puppy.

Does your puppy start mouthing you if you don't play when **he** wants to? Is he constantly tripping you up, or starting to play tug-o-war with the leash when you're trying to walk him? Is he uncooperative when you ask him to do something like getting off the couch? If your answer is 'yes' to these questions, you may have a bossy or dominant puppy. With this type of puppy you may need to exercise a little more discipline.

Discipline does not mean punishment, It means correcting an unwanted behavior and teaching a new, more desirable one. In this case, we want puppies that understand by our reactions that their behavior is unacceptable. Since they may not look for as much guidance from you, these puppies need to learn to accept you as a leader. The first step in letting a bossy puppy know you are in charge is to be handled by you in a variety of ways. Touching the paws and tail of a confident puppy often stimulates a mouthing response. Rather than forcing them to accept being handled, we want to increase their comfort level. Touch a toe and give a treat if they have not already mouthed you. If they do, use your "no mouth" or similar command and try again. Your goal is to be able to gently squeeze their paw in a non-threatening manner. This will help with nail trimming later as well.

As a prelude to good dental care, a puppy should also get used to your fingers in its mouth. Begin by sliding your finger coated in tuna fish oil or one of the commercially prepared dog toothpastes into the pouch created by the jowls on the side of the puppy's muzzle. Try to briefly massage its gums, praising all the while. If this presents no problem, slip back towards the molars, actually letting your finger run over the surface of the tooth. If, at this point, your puppy bites down too hard, use one of the corrections previously mentioned, again offering the back of your hand to lick.

With a puppy that is really being obnoxious, a more direct approach may be needed. For this method, your puppy should be wearing a well-fitted buckle collar. Should he begin to mouthe you, slip your finger under his collar just under the jaw on either side. Looking directly into

his eyes, say "no mouth" or similar command in a growly voice. Wait for him to look away or to put his ears back slightly, as a sign of submission. Release him and walk away or briefly close him in another room for a few minutes as a "time out". There is no need to shake the puppy or overdo this type of correction, the puppy will get the message.

For the lunging, snapping puppy, remember that movement encourages them. With these types of puppies you need to be aware of how you may be motivating them to mouthe. Never encourage games involving your hands or feet as targets. Hold your leash so that there is never any part of it dangling. Until you have started to retrain your puppy, it is a good idea to avoid wearing loose, flowing clothing. It is natural to raise our arms when we feel physically threatened; unfortunately, that may lure a lunging puppy closer to your face.

Rather than pulling away, concentrate on pushing in. As the puppy begins to mouthe you, push your hand in further to create a bit of discomfort. This causes the puppy to "spit" you out. You regain control of the situation by reversing the puppy's action. Once your hand has been released, praise. Spraying your hands and leash (cotton web, preferably) with a commercially prepared, bitter tasting spray can act as a deterrent. Use diluted lemon juice in a pinch.

If the methods above don't work, you may need to become a "statue". Cross your arms across your chest, turn your back to your puppy, and become motionless. When you do not respond, your puppy gets no reward for his behavior. When done consistently, this should extinguish the "game". This method also works for a puppy that tries to initiate games of "tug-o-war". If the leash goes slack instead of pulling back, the fun is gone for your puppy.