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PUPPY ESSENTIALS: CHEWING & PUPPY PROOFING

Puppies chew. It's natural and predictable. Being physically and mentally prepared will enable you to get your dog through this period without your puppy forming any bad habits, leading to expensive destructive chewing later.

Start by puppy proofing your home. Because puppies spend every waking moment exploring the world, discovering what feels good, tastes good and is fun to do, a puppy will put her mouth on anything and everything within reach. If she can get to it, she'll try it.

Raising a puppy means guiding her as she discovers what is OK to have, to chew, to eat, to do—and what isn't. As her guide you have four responsibilities: prevent access; supervise; educate and puppy-proof—put it out of her reach.

- **Prevent access** (close doors or gate) to rooms you don't want her in, at least until she's trained. When you can't watch her, prevent access by confining her in a crate.
- **Supervision** means keeping an eye on her every waking moment that she's able to move about your home, occupying her with education and play.
- **Education** is teaching her the right and the wrong of her world. When she attempts something you don't want her to do, utter a sound such as "Uh Uh!" and distract her with a toy. She'll learn that biting chair legs fall into the category of "Don't even think about it," while chew toys are fine.
- **Then there's puppy proofing.** A puppy-proofed home has no books on the lower bookshelves, no magazines on the coffee table, potted plants are out of reach and so is the trash. Puppy proofing is a sensible approach to the first few months of your puppy's life with you. This fortress mentality isn't forever; it's just for a few months—time and effort well spent.

No matter how well you unclutter your puppy's environment, you can't eliminate everything - nor do you want to. Through a combination of prevention, supervision, education and confinement, a puppy learns what is and isn't OK to put her mouth on. Provide your puppy with no more than two safe toys at a time (see below). Giving your puppy too many objects to chew gives him the idea that *everything* is his. Giving him just a few toys makes it easier to teach him to differentiate between his and yours.

Young puppies chew to explore their environment much the way human babies put everything in their mouths. It's natural and important for puppies to do this as part of their learning. The important factor is you—making sure your puppy learns what is and isn't acceptable to chew during the early exploratory and teething period.

Puppy chewing is also related to teething. Around four to five months the deciduous puppy or "milk" teeth fall out and the permanent teeth erupt. You can prevent destructive chewing habits forming by providing the puppy with acceptable items to chew, and preventing him from chewing other things. Supervise your puppy and use a crate whenever you can't watch him. Until a dog is beyond the teething period (in general around 10 months to a year), anytime you leave your dog alone or are busy and unable to watch him, crate him.

Teaching a puppy what is and isn't acceptable to chew requires supervising him as he explores his environment—a natural and important thing for puppies to do. The moment he is about to put his mouth on something you don't want him to chew, interrupt him with "Uh!", and re-direct him to his own chew toy. By consistently teaching your puppy what is off limits and what is acceptable to chew, you'll raise a dog that will be trustworthy as an adult.

While you are training your puppy and adolescent dog what is and isn't acceptable to chew, you must watch him. If he's chewing a bone under your chair (acceptable), he just might roll over onto the other hip, changing his perspective, and start chewing the chair leg (unacceptable). Your puppy is not being willfully destructive, it was simply there. To teach him that the bone is OK and the chair leg is not, say "Uh!" the moment he *starts* chewing the chair, and direct him to the bone.

By supervising your puppy, preventing him from chewing things on his own, and by crating him when you can't keep an eye on him, your dog will mature through the teething periods without forming expensive habits.

Good Chew Toys VS Not-So-Good Ones

Provide your dog with chew toys that satisfy his needs. Young puppies prefer soft toys such as a knotted terry cloth towel. Some teething puppies may be helped by chewing on something cold: dampen a towel and place it in the freezer, then give it to your pup. Never give your puppy an article of clothing such as an old sock or shoe to chew. Your dog won't differentiate between old shoes and new.

Once the adult teeth are in (around 6 months), most dogs prefer harder toys such as Nylabones and antlers. We recommend dried beef tracheas and bully sticks more than rawhide chews. Whatever your dog chews, supervise and remove small pieces your dog could choke on.

This handout is provided to you by Gail Fisher's All Dogs Gym & Inn, where we believe that an educated owner and an educated dog are the best ingredients for a lifetime of mutual enjoyment.