

## **Chewing**

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### **West Wind Dog Training**

Dogs chew for many reasons. Puppies explore with their mouths. Everything and anything will go in. When they begin teething, chewing eases discomfort and helps puppy teeth work their way out. Adults chew for fun, to alleviate boredom, because it feels good. Chewing is natural and to be expected. Your job is to teach your dog to chew only appropriate items.

Make certain you use items approved for dog use. Make certain the items you give your puppy or dog to chew are sturdy and will not be ingested rapidly. Rawhide flips and chips, cow/pigs ears (I give these occasionally as treats but not as regular chews), latex toys (the cute squeaky newspapers and such) are not the best choices. They can be eaten fast, offer no nutritional value and do not give a long lasting, satisfying chew. Some squeaky toys have squeakers that may pull out and choke a puppy. Some dogs are fine with the rolled rawhide bones (also called knotted bones) and retriever rolls (rawhide rolled into rolls with no knots at the end). It all depends on how aggressively your dog chews. Old shoes, socks, old stuffed animals are also a bad choice. Your dog will not know the difference between your \$180 running shoes and that old tennis shoe you gave him. Children's toys will not hold up to a vigorous chewer. Plus, button eyes and noses can be eaten and cause choking or obstruction. I keep all my dog toys in a specific box. The dogs learn that if something is in the box or came from the box it may be played with.

I use pressed rawhide bones (the rawhide is compressed under high pressure into a sturdy bone), the sterilized bones made for dogs (watch Puppy, I have one dog that can break off chunks of these bones so I never let him have one unattended) and rope toys. I also use the fleece chew men (other shapes available) made specifically for dogs. Know your dog and watch how he reacts to various chew toys. Should he shatter a bone or shred a fleece toy, you may wish to change to a different chew or try a different bone or fleece toy. Sometimes, there may be a weakness you did not see. Not every toy is safe for every dog! Choose toys appropriately sized for your dog. I would never think of using a four-inch bone with my Australian Shepherd-Newfoundland cross. It is just too small and he could choke. However, that giant, four-foot rawhide bone may dwarf my Sheltie's mouth!

Get a variety of toys and rotate every day or two so there are always "new" toys out. This way, Puppy has a variety of toys and you do not have to buy dozens of toys to keep Puppy entertained.

Should you see Puppy chewing something inappropriate, use a firm, growly "NO! LEAVE IT!" and take the item away. Now IMMEDIATELY get a good chew and encourage Puppy to take it. Once he does praise lavishly. Remember, you must catch Puppy in the act so the correction will be effective. A good thing to have on hand is one of the no chewing products. There are a variety of sprays and ointments to deter chewing. Find one your puppy really hates and spray items if necessary. Do not spray it directly into Puppy's mouth. That is cruel. Follow the directions on the product.

Teaching appropriate items to chew can save a life. Puppies will chew electrical cords, bottles of poison, plants, objects that can cause intestinal obstructions. They have to learn what is good and bad. The safest things are prevention. Keep poisons out of reach. Hide cords (some home improvement places even carry cord cover as do places that sell baby proofing items) and check to see if your plants are nontoxic. Many garden centers have lists of toxic plants. Basically, puppy-proof (and doggy-proof) as if you had a precocious toddler around! It is far better to prevent an incident than to treat one!

Should you think Puppy ingested a poison or ate something that could either cause a blockage or intestinal damage (pins, needles, nails, nylons, fishing line, coins, rocks, antifreeze, household cleaners, plants, etc.) call your vet immediately.