

Destructive Behavior In Dogs

Chewing, playing, and exploring are normal behaviors for dogs. But these behaviors can sometimes escalate, resulting in the destruction of household property — a frustrating problem for owners. Identifying the cause of your dog's behavior is key to correcting it.

Common causes of destructive behavior:

Teething

When teething, puppies' gums may be painful. Chewing appears to help relieve the discomfort of teething. The behavior usually stops after permanent teeth appear. Supplying your pup with toys and treats used to soothe the irritation and allow them to gnaw on something will set them up for success!

Separation anxiety

This is one of the most common causes of destructive behavior in dogs. Dogs with separation anxiety tend to have a strong attachment to their owners — following owners from room to room, displaying frantic greeting behaviors, and reacting to owners' preparation to leave the house. Separation anxiety can be caused by a change in your family's schedule that results in your dog being left alone more often, a move to a new house, the death or loss of another family pet or a period at a boarding kennel.

Separation anxiety behaviors include excessive vocalizations, house soiling, and destructive behavior. Because these behaviors are motivated by anxiety, punishment will make the problem worse. Separation anxiety can be resolved using [counter conditioning and desensitization techniques](#) under the supervision of a professional animal behaviorist.

Fears and phobias

Fearful responses to thunderstorms and loud noises often involve escape attempts that result in destructive behavior. Doors, door frames, window trim, screens, and walls are often damaged. These problems can be especially dangerous because excessively fearful dogs may injure themselves attempting to break through windows or doors to escape a feared situation.

Social Isolation or boredom

If dogs don't receive opportunities for social interaction with their owners, or if they don't have playmates or toys, they sometimes entertain themselves by engaging in destructive behavior. Providing the animal with appropriate toys and social interactions will help them stay mentally and physically stimulated.

Attention-seeking behavior

Without realizing it, owners may pay the most attention to their dogs when they are misbehaving. Dogs who don't receive attention and reinforcement for appropriate behavior may show destructive behavior as a way to attract attention, even if the attention is negative. Focus on giving your pup attention and treats often throughout the day when they are calmly laying down or doing something else desirable.

Play behavior

Normal play behavior can often result in destructive behavior, and often involves digging or chewing, shredding, and shaking of toy-like objects such as shoes, socks or paper objects. This is very common in young dogs and often happens when the dog is unsupervised or doesn't have enough outlets for appropriate play behavior. Provide your dog with toys and chews in addition to keeping other items picked up and put away. Kennel your pup when you are not able to supervise them so they are unable to get into trouble!

Investigative behavior

Dogs may inadvertently damage items in their environment when they are exploring or investigating. Dogs investigate objects by pawing at them and exploring them with their mouths. Many dogs also like to fetch and carry objects. Novel or unfamiliar objects are often damaged this way, especially when dogs are left unsupervised for long periods of time.