

# Preventing Destructive Behavior

The focus for developing good home behavior should be on rewarding the puppy for appropriate behaviors when it is loose in the home. When the puppy cannot be supervised it should be confined to a crate, x-pen or tie-down. Puppies should leave household and personal items alone and only interact with appropriate dog toys. If puppies are taught to ignore inappropriate items, they will be less likely to be destructive.

## Goal Behavior

The puppy can be left alone in the house with access to multiple rooms without picking up inappropriate items or exhibiting destructive behavior. Upon recall to campus for guide training, the puppy should be reliable when left in at least one room for a minimum of thirty minutes. Ideally, the puppy should be capable of appropriate behavior when left loose in the whole house for several hours. (See document "Final Goal Behaviors")

## Prerequisites

Puppies should have an introduction to ground tether, hand tether and collar cues prior to starting the following exercises. In the tethering exercises, puppies should consistently and reliably redirect their focus from distractions back to the handler, or away from the distractions.

## Preparation

- Suggested items
  - For puppies under 12 weeks of age – appropriate toys and inappropriate items (e.g. tissue paper, magazines, books, a dryer sheet), 6 foot dragline or light-weight leash.
  - For puppies over 12 weeks – use a longer dragline (12 – 20 feet as necessary).
  - A bait bag ready with enough kibble for the training session.
- With the puppy confined in a crate in another room, the raiser should scatter several of items in small area of the room. There should be sufficient distance between items so that the puppy views them as separate items and there should be sufficient space to maneuver between items.

## Initial Sessions - Getting Started

- The puppy should be taken from its crate with a leash attached to the flat collar and encouraged to walk into the area that has been prepared.
- While the raiser continues to hold the leash, the puppy should be given an "Okay" to allow it to investigate the items on the floor.
- Verbal praise should be given when the puppy shows interest in an approved toy. Physical praise may be used as well.
- A brief investigation of an inappropriate item is OK and should be ignored.

- If the puppy intentionally avoids an inappropriate item, the behavior can be marked with a “Nice” and reinforced with food reward.
- If the puppy attempts to pick up an inappropriate item, the handler should use the hand tether technique to prevent it. Once the puppy ceases pulling towards the object, the handler may mark the behavior and deliver food reward. The puppy should be allowed to continue to investigate the items on the floor for a few minutes.
- If the puppy makes incorrect choices several times in a row, the situation should be made easier by reducing the number of inappropriate items. More practice on tethering techniques (see Ground Tether and Hand Tether documents) might also be helpful to train desired responses.
- If the puppy stops investigating items, end the session.

### **Intermediate Sessions**

- The puppy should have a longer dragline attached to the flat collar and the line should no longer be hand-held but dragging from the pup’s collar.
- As in the first session, interactions with appropriate items may be verbally and physically praised. If the puppy approaches the handler with a dog toy, the handler may engage in a quick play session.
- Any sign that the puppy is purposely ignoring an inappropriate item should be marked with a “Nice” and reinforced with food reward.
- If the puppy picks up an inappropriate item, the handler should pick up the end of the dragline and pull the puppy in calmly. The item should be removed from the puppy’s mouth in a quiet, efficient manner. No verbal or physical correction should be given. The line should be dropped again after the item is returned to the original location.
- If a puppy continues to choose inappropriate items over approved toys, the handler should revisit ground and hand tether techniques to improve the puppy’s impulse control. Once a puppy is making good choices using tethering, the initial sessions can be restarted.

### **Proofing Behavior**

- As the puppy learns to choose appropriate dog toys and leave the inappropriate items alone, sessions should model real life situations. One or two personal items can be left on the floor. Randomly scattered approved toys should also be available.
- Raisers should appear relaxed and inattentive to the puppy while actually observing the puppy carefully.
- Access to additional rooms should be given as the puppy’s behavior becomes more reliable. When unsupervised access is first allowed, puppies should only be unattended for a minute or two. To set the puppy up for success, the rooms should not have any inappropriate items that might tempt the pup into making poor choices. (See documents “Teaching Good House Behavior” and “Home Alone”)

### **Reinforcing Appropriate Behavior Outside of Training Sessions**

- If the puppy picks up an approved toy, acknowledge the good choice with verbal praise and petting.
- For pups who have greater difficulty settling: When a puppy is quietly settled with an appropriate dog toy, a food reward may be given. No marker should be used and the handler should approach the puppy to deliver the food. Frequent reinforcement of this kind will quickly teach the puppy that calm, settled behaviors are very rewarding. (See documents “Rewarding Calm Behavior” and “Teaching Settled (Calm) Behavior in the Home”.)
- Once the puppy is successfully choosing only the approved dog toys, gradually reward randomly and less frequently. Continue occasional reinforcement until the puppy is considered completely reliable in the house.

## Notes

- Raisers should start with inappropriate items of lower interest to the puppy. As the puppy becomes more proficient at making good choices, more tempting items may be used (socks, shoes, a toddler’s toy, a paper plate with the scent of food).
- It is helpful to conduct the training sessions in different rooms of the house to help the puppy generalize good behavior to all rooms and locations.
- Raisers should not play games of chase and possession with puppies, as this will promote the grabbing of *any* nearby item for use in the game.
- Puppies might interpret the raiser’s actions to regain possession of an inappropriate item as the beginnings of a game of chase and keep away. It is important to maintain a disinterested air to prevent the excitement from escalating
- Some puppies might continue to pick up inappropriate items. In these circumstances, the use of more corrective methods may be necessary. The club leader or CFR can offer guidance and direction for raisers whose puppies continue to show interest in inappropriate items.