



PAWTENTIAL FAMILY DOG TRAINING

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Help! I Have a Demolition Dog!

The principles outlined in this handout are intended as a general guide only and should be applied under the supervision of an Accredited CGC™ Instructor. This is not a program for aggressive dogs. If your dog has shown aggressive behaviour toward you, your family, or other people, you should speak with the Instructor listed at the top of this handout.

Oh no - it's happened again! You've come home to find the washing strewn across the backyard, your favourite pot plants shredded and the family's shoes bearing that "custom-made-tooth-mark" look! In the midst of this mayhem sits your dog, scraps of your best jeans hanging from his mouth and a look of extreme guilt on his face. Obviously he knows he's done the wrong thing - his ears are back, his tail between his legs - if ever there's been a guilty dog, this is it! To make it worse he jumps up at you and licks your face - such defiance!

STOP! Deeper is not displaying signs of guilt or defiance - he is merely reacting to your body language, tone of voice and obvious distress. From his point of view he was having a wonderful time playing with all the exciting toys you left out for him - and even better, most of them reminded him of you because they held your scent. Suddenly you've arrived back and are displaying some abnormally aggressive behaviour which seems to be directed at him. Deeper has no idea why you are angry with him, only that he needs to do his best to make you happy again - hence the grovelling, jumping and licking.

Why does Deeper destroy things?

"Destructive" behaviour can be the result of:

- 🐾 Lack of training
- 🐾 Boredom
- 🐾 Attention Seeking
- 🐾 Anxiety
- 🐾 Playtime Enthusiasm
- 🐾 Health Problems
- 🐾 Hunger/Thirst/Shelter



Let's have a look at each of the above and explore ideas for alleviating the problem.

Lack of training:

It is not fair to complain about destructive behaviour if you have not taught Deefer what is, and isn't, appropriate for him to play with. Deefer will not naturally know the difference between your best shoes, and the old loafer you gave him to chew on. He will not know that the flapping, whirling items on the clothesline are your clothes and are out of bounds as playthings - just as a toddler doesn't understand that grandma's doll collection is only for looking at, not for touching.

Management ideas for lack of training:

- 🐾 Teach! To be successful in having a non-destructive dog, we need to provide items that Deefer can play with - and teach him to play with them. A plastic toy only becomes a toy in Deefer's eyes if you teach him that playing with it is rewarding.
- 🐾 Make it clear that you are pleased with Deefer for interacting with the items he is allowed to play with, such as chewtoys and bones, etc., by praising and playing with him.
- 🐾 Restrict Deefer's unsupervised access to those items which are dangerous or which he cannot interact with and supervise him whilst training that those items must not be touched.
- 🐾 Provide alternatives - if Deefer shows an interest in a "banned" item, entice him away to something more exciting or rewarding and praise profusely for doing the right thing.
- 🐾 Clear your yard and house of items at puppy level as much as possible (time for a good spring clean!) leaving only those items which he is allowed to play with. Gradually reintroduce the "banned" items without making a fuss and encourage Deefer to go and find his toys instead of the new item.
- 🐾 Teach Deefer the meaning of "Leave" - ask your CGC™ Instructor for more information on this.
- 🐾 Teach Deefer to accept being confined, either outside in a pen, or inside in a crate or small room. If Deefer is confined to an acceptable area when unsupervised he will not be able to gain access to items you value. Make sure you leave something to keep him occupied, along with bedding and water.



Boredom:

Boredom is the result of insufficient mental or physical stimulation. Deefer can suffer from boredom if his environment is lacking in stimulation. Even a big yard can be just a large prison for him: he has all day, every day, to get to know every inch of it. Deefer cannot relieve the stress of boredom by going for a walk, reading a book or visiting friends. If the environment you provide does not have enough variety or stimulation for him then he will begin to look for activities to keep himself occupied and relieve his pent-up energy.



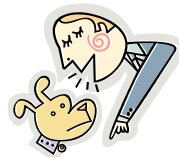
Management ideas for Boredom:

Enriching Deefer's environment with activities and items of interest will help alleviate boredom. Ask your CGC™ Instructor for the Delta handout titled "Backyard Fun for Your Dog!" for ideas on this.

Attention Seeking:

As we said earlier, Deefer is generally a social animal. He enjoys company and is not overly content if left alone a lot. Deefer may have discovered that playing with items you value, especially those with your scent and which you pay a lot of attention to (eg clothing, plants, etc,) tends to gain attention - even if it is the wrong attention! Deefer soon learns that if he plays with one of these items someone will interact with him in some way.

In Deefer's opinion sometimes any attention is better than no attention. Even you yelling and chasing him around to retrieve the item is seen by Deefer as being worthwhile - he has gained your attention and you have interacted with him.



Management ideas for Attention Seeking:

- 🐾 The main issue here is to pay more attention to Deefer when he is playing with something you want him to play with and calmly remove items he is not allowed to play with, or remove him from the items and redirect his attention elsewhere.
- 🐾 Try to anticipate those occasions when he is about to do something to gain your attention and divert him before he begins. If you miss this opportunity and he has already destroyed something, see this as a sign that you need to provide a more stimulating environment, or train him better.
- 🐾 Ensure Deefer has daily interaction with you to fulfil his social needs. If he has his mental, physical and emotional needs tended to, he will be less stressed and less inclined to want your constant attention.

Anxiety:


Do you find that Deefer follows you everywhere when you are at home, possibly even trying to go to the bathroom with you? Does he complain when shut away from you?

Allowing Deefer to become very dependent on you can lead to anxiety when you are away, which in turn can cause Deefer to become destructive because he is anxious and upset. Even a simple change in your daily routine or household circumstances becomes a major issue for him.

This can be a most frustrating problem and it is best you ask your local CGC™ Instructor for a referral to a qualified Veterinary Behaviourist if you feel Deefer has this problem.

Management ideas to prevent anxiety:


To prevent Deefer from developing this problem, try the following:

- 🐾 When you know you will be away from home, ensure Deefer has plenty of environmental enrichment to keep him occupied.
- 🐾 Prepare a meal for Deefer and give this to him as you leave. Better still, use a Kong or food dispenser so that Deefer is kept occupied for longer eating his meal.
- 🐾 Try leaving a radio or TV on softly in the background to give the impression of company. 
- 🐾 Gradually get Deefer used to being separated from you for an increasing length of time while you are at home. Put his bed in a convenient area where he can see you moving from room to room and install a cheap, simple toddler barrier in the doorway to stop him from following you everywhere.
- 🐾 Keep arrivals and departures very matter of fact and low key - don't make too much of a fuss at either time.
- 🐾 Reward Deefer when he is quiet and relaxed and/or playing with appropriate items.

Playtime Enthusiasm:

You may find that Deefer tends to become destructive when he is playing - it is natural for dogs to want to grab, tear and chew when excited.

Management ideas for Playtime Enthusiasm:

- 🐾 The key here is to reward Deefer for calm, quiet behaviour and show him that play will stop if he becomes destructive.
- 🐾 If he will not stop, put the toy away and try again later.
- 🐾 Reward him with a treat when he brings toys back to you and begin playing again before he has a chance to stop and chew or tear.
- 🐾 Keep play sessions low key to prevent escalation of excitement. High intensity play sessions should only last for a short while between calmer activities.
- 🐾 Request a good manners behaviour such as "sit" or "drop" before and during play sessions to refocus him. 
- 🐾 Teach him to settle between throws or tugs.
- 🐾 Playing tug games can encourage destructive behaviour, so think carefully about whether you really want to play these games and consult your CGC™ Instructor on how to avoid problems if you decide to play tug.

Health Problems:

Does Deefer suffer from fleas, a skin allergy, or a dental problem? All these things can contribute to making him irritable and more likely to be destructive, particularly toward his bedding. If he has fleas or an allergy he may tend to scratch whilst on his bed, which may cause his bedding to tear and become a

target for Deefer's interest. A dental problem may make Deefer more inclined to want to chew to try to relieve tension and pain in his mouth.

Management ideas for Health Problems:

Make sure Deefer is in good health. If any of the symptoms mentioned above are present, or if you feel there is anything unusual about his state of health, make sure he has a Veterinary check-up immediately. These conditions and other health problems can contribute to behaviour problems.



Hunger/Thirst/Shelter:

Check Deefer's living conditions thoroughly. Is he well-fed? Does he have access to plenty of clean, cool water? Is he sheltered from climatic conditions - both hot and cold? His destructive behaviour may be an indication that he is uncomfortable. It is your responsibility as his primary carer to make sure he has all the necessities for a comfortable life.

Why shouldn't I physically punish Deefer for destructive behaviour?

Some people promote various punishments for "demolition dogs", ranging from yelling, to hitting with rolled up newspapers, or using electronic or chemical collars.

In most cases the punishment does not deter Deefer, as the reason for his destructive behaviour is not being addressed. Punishment will tend to make Deefer anxious and stressed because he will associate the punishment with you, not with the act he committed prior to you arriving on the scene. Punishment can also cause Deefer to display aggressive behaviour toward people - hardly conducive to a good relationship between you and him!

We believe it is far better to work out why Deefer is displaying destructive behaviour and remedy the situation using the ideas given here and in the "Backyard Fun for Your Dog!" handout.

Are there other reasons why Deefer destroys things?

Yes! We have listed only the most common reasons, but there are many other reasons why Deefer may shred, tear, chew, etc. It is up to you to use your initiative to think about why Deefer is destroying things and work out solutions which suit you both. You really need to be honest and fair when doing this - have you really taught him what is his and what is yours? Have you really provided enough environmental enrichment for him?



A demolition dog can be frustrating to live with, however if you are observant you can usually discover what makes Deefer behave the way he does. Applying the appropriate management ideas will generally help, however for best results do this under the supervision of your local CGC™ Instructor.

Look for the other Handouts in the Delta "Help!" series:

- 🐾 Help! My Dog Digs!
- 🐾 Help! My Dog Needs Better Manners!
- 🐾 Help! My Puppy Bites!
- 🐾 Help! How Do I Housetrain My Puppy?
- 🐾 Help! My Dog Jumps!
- 🐾 Help! My Dog Barks!
- 🐾 Backyard Fun for Your Dog!
- 🐾 Help! My Puppy Needs Life Experiences!

***For more information on Canine Good Citizen™ training,
contact the Instructor listed on the front page of this handout.***

***For more information on the Delta Society go to
www.deltasocietyaustralia.com.au***



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