

# Puppy Proofing

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Did you know that the real secret to training a puppy is careful management of your environment? Could it be that you are spending more time trying to teach your dog what not to do, when you could simply prevent behaviors from happening in the first place? In this article we want to make a plan for puppy proofing your home.

Puppies get into everything. When you bring a dog home, their world gets bigger, and the best way to learn about the world is by exploration. Dogs explore with their eyes, ears, nose and mouth. When puppies want to explore something, one technique usually always gets used, putting it in his mouth. We explore objects by touching them with our hands and moving them around, dogs do the same activity but use their mouth to figure it out.

1. Get down on the floor (puppy level) and look around. What do you see? Identify objects that are hanging, swinging or low enough that a puppy might be able to grab it.
2. Danger, danger. Watch out for electrical cords, household cleaners, medications, mouse or insect poison or any chemical product that is low enough for a puppy to access. If it is in a low cabinet under the sink you can buy infant locks and keep your dog from being able to push his way in. Dangerous chemicals like anti-freeze pose a serious hazard to pets so they should never be kept anywhere your dog can get to them. Consider the height and location to where you keep your food and where you plan to keep his. You will do well if you have your food up high and his in a locked container. Chocolate and other dangerous foods need to be placed up high and out of harm's way.
3. Trash-can smorgasbord. Buy a tall garbage can with a closing lid. Do not expect your dog to resist the temptation of an all you can eat scrap buffet. Dogs are natural scavengers. Time to change your routine if you are not good at taking out the trash. Consider putting food scraps in a smaller bag and taking them out right away. You don't want to ever be the pet owner who finds their dog eating cooked chicken bones after you had wings during the game.
4. Surface area can be the key. If you own a beautiful decorative rug it might be time to roll it up for a few months. Think about your dog spending time on a surface that is easy to clean and manage for when accidents happen, because they will happen.
5. Start small and earn freedom. Confine your dog to small spaces at first, like a crate, single room, gated area or small area of your home. This will ensure you are able to control the space and build good habits before you give your puppy full access of the house. Baby gates work great for blocking off a room to keep a puppy in or out.
6. Numbers game. You know what you don't want your puppy to chew on, so now it is time to experiment with objects, chews and feeder toys that will encourage chewing on acceptable items. And keep it fresh. If your pup grows tired of the objects you got at first, put them away for a while and re-introduce them in a few weeks.

As your puppy ages and you start to have successful potty routines, less chewing and an attentive relationship, start introducing him to different areas of the home while you are able to supervise. Try short sessions with more and more freedom before you decide to just open the whole home up to him for an entire day.

Puppy proofing and careful management of your environment can save you a lot of time, money and stress. Preventing bad habits from becoming normal is more effective than trying to catch a puppy in the act every time they make a mistake and lecturing him on what a naughty scoundrel you think he is. Don't forget to give him lots of positive feedback when he makes great choices. This will define your relationship.