

Want to “Puppy/Dog-Proof” Your House? Just Get Down on All Fours!

As dog owners, it is our responsibility to provide a safe environment for the four legged members of our family. This applies to our adult pets as well as puppies, because any dog that comes to live with a new family should be treated like a puppy until the dog has proven to be “house reliable”.

Of course, even the most “house reliable” pet can have “behavior lapses” when left along too long or with too many tempting items to play with or chew on. And, as humans, we often underestimate those household items that are irresistible to our pets. We are really good at leaving our human “toys” laying around where our pets have easy access to them. And, to top it off, when the dog eats the remote control that we left out – we blame the dog! Not only do we have difficulty cleaning up after ourselves but the problem is often compounded by giving our pets too much freedom – and we give that freedom too soon.

The old saying, “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” really applies here. If you have kids, think about those steps you took to prepare your home when your baby started crawling & walking: small choking items were picked up, outlets were covered (dogs like to lick these too), and electrical cords were hidden. So why don’t we provide some of these same protections for our dogs? Often dog owners think dogs are will instinctively know to leave dangerous items alone. Well, not true! We have to protect our pets just as we would protect our children.

A good way to see what your dog sees is to get down on all fours. What do you see? What is on the coffee table – magazines, remotes, left-over snacks that might cause diarrhea? What decorative items do you have on those built-in niches that can be reached by your bet: artificial flowers, precious photo albums? Don’t forget to look on the floor too! Did you leave yesterday’s socks & shoes by your chair? Are the kids’ small plastic toys yet to be picked up? Dogs, especially Goldens, love to pick up things on the floor and often wind up swallowing them, causing an emergency trip to the vet and sometimes costly surgery.



When dogs are bored they look for entertainment. If shredding the recipes in your current issue of Bon Appetit entertains Rover, then he will continue to tear them up until YOU put them out of his reach. It's very important to remember that dogs live in the moment. If you do come home to find your favorite magazines shredded, do not scold or punish your dog – it's too late. Even though your dog may look guilty or scared, he is only reacting to your body language and tone of voice. He does not know how to associate your anger with actions he took while you were gone. Rover will not understand why he is being punished. Just clean up the mess and promise your dog you'll clean up your things better next time. If we set our dogs up for success, then everyone wins!

Once you have scanned the room on all fours, stand up on your knees. What do you see on your counters? If your arms can reach that fresh loaf of bread in a plastic bag, surely an ingenious Golden Retriever can! What dangers are on the counter? Is there where your car keys were left, along with some leftover chocolate muffins? Do you have bowl of candy or some loose pieces of gum? Xylitol, an ingredient in sugar-free gum & candy is deadly to dog. It only takes a very small amount for your dog to suffer a life threatening emergency. So store this dangerous item in the pantry or a drawer, and be sure your kids don't have hidden gum in their bedrooms.

As you may have discovered in the exercise above, there are many things that pose a danger to our pets, but it isn't always practical to remove every item that may entice a dog – we'd have to live in an empty house! The solution is to close doors to rooms that provide temptation.

Just as you shouldn't give a new puppy the run of the house, it isn't wise to give a newly adopted or foster dog too much freedom until they are house reliable. Because rescued dogs come with unknown backgrounds, we don't often know what human "toys" trigger unwanted behavior.

Crates and baby gates are also a great way to protect your pets (puppy and adult) from dangerous and frustrating situations. Once Rover is house reliable, the crates and gates can be stored away. Remember, crate training is not punishment – it protects your pet. Plus, it's always good to have your pets comfortable with a crate in case you ever need to evacuate your home for some reason. Emergency shelters that allow pets require them to be crated – that is NOT the time to introduce your dog to a crate for the first time.

To relieve boredom, provide your pet with plenty of dog-safe toys so human "toys" don't seem so enticing. And, by all means, don't forget to give your pet plenty of exercise and attention – a tired dog is a good dog!

*If you need help training your dog, look for a positive-based trainer in your area that will work with you and all family members – humans need the training as much as our dogs!