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## Stealing and Destructive Chewing

**Stealing:** Dogs are natural born thieves! It's a trait that served their ancestors well, but these days we often find it inconvenient and annoying, and it can be dangerous to our furry friends.

The best thing to do is to puppy proof your house before you even bring your puppy home. Put things away (or at least safely out of reach) that are dangerous or valuable. Get in the habit of picking up loose objects. Have your kids practice putting away their toys, pointing out that that toy car could have been in Fido's tummy if it was left out. I haven't had a puppy for 10 years, and often look around at my own house at all the things a puppy could have picked up. Just now while writing this piece I see a pen that I dropped on the floor and didn't pick up. Let your puppy make you a better housekeeper!

***What if your puppy steals an object?*** First off teach him the exchange game. Puppies as young as eight weeks old can learn this game quickly. When he picks up one of his toys, have a treat ready and put it by his nose and say "give," "drop," "out" (whatever your word is), and when he gives it up, give him the yummy treat. Eventually, replace the treat with another toy they should have. The other benefit of teaching this is that it is the beginning of the fetch game.

Another thing that this will help is to teach the "come" command. Check out my "Restrained Recall" video to show you how I teach this skill. The way I teach it, it is a fun game for the dog, so again, an eight week old puppy can learn it. In fact, this is the best age to teach it. If they master this, when they pick up something you can just call them over to you. They will either come with the object or drop it along the way as they come to you.

Make sure that if your puppy takes something, you don't start screaming and chasing after him. Puppies love to play keep away with other puppies and he'll start running away playing "na-na try to catch me," and think it is great fun. Instead call them to you. If they don't come, try to distract him by rattling the treat jar, opening the back door, making fun high pitch sounds, or bouncing a ball, etc. Make it something that will get their curiosity and entice them to it. When they do come to you, have them sit, and then play the exchange game as shown above.

Never punish them. This will teach them to take the object and go hide with it. If you punish them after you call them to you, they will learn that coming to you is punishment. If you need to distract your dog from doing something they shouldn't be doing, shake an empty soda pop can fill with a few coins. This makes a sharp, distracting noise, and can serve as an effective noise interrupter. This often gets them to stop to figure out what the noise is, and then you can call your puppy or go get them. Pick up and put away the object they have and replace it with one of their toys.

## **Destructive Chewing**

The most important thing here is 100% supervision or containment so your puppy can't get an object and chew it up before you see them.

Puppies chew for three reasons: either they are teething, bored, or stressed. Make sure they have plenty of exercise. It is also natural for puppies to explore with their mouths. Have lots of chewable, edible toys for them, and make sure they aren't stressed. Puppy hood can be a stressful time as they have so much to learn in the human world that is so different from the environment they come from in the whelping box with their mom and littermates.

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