

ACADEMY OF CANINE BEHAVIOR

BINKY TOYS

If you have problems with your dog chewing things when you are not home, developing a “Binky” toy for your dog might offer a solution.

STEP #1: CHOOSE A “BINKY.” A “Binky” toy can be any item that is safe to leave with your dog and is not edible. A toy made of rawhide or any like substance will not work. It should be one of the types of toys that are safe and not easily destroyed should your dog really work it over. It is easier if it is already a favorite with your dog. Examples of toys that should work: Nylabone[®] toys, Kongs[®] or Tuffys[®], some of the processed bones, and for some dogs, the rope toys. On rare occasions a stuffed toy or squeaky might work but is only recommended if you have a very soft-mouthed dog that has already proven it will not destroy that type of toy.

STEP #2: BRING THE “BINKY” TO LIFE. Give the toy it’s own name. We will call it the “Binky”. Pick up any toy that is even closely like the “Binky” and put them away. Way away! Now you develop a relationship with the “Binky”. Hold it. Talk to it. Use it’s name while doing this. Let the dog see and hear you doing this. Don’t over do it. Just an occasional interaction is fine.

STEP #3: RESTRICT ACCESS TO THE “BINKY.” When you are not with the “Binky” put it in it’s own spot. The top of the refrigerator is usually good. It has to be someplace the dog can not get to but you can. The dog needs to see where the “Binky” lives. Do not leave the “Binky” out for your dog to play with on his own.

Once you have established the existence of the “Binky” you are ready to use it to help stop the dog’s destructive behavior while you are gone.

STEP #4: START CREATING “BINKY” ROUTINES. Get ready to go out. It is best if you act like you are going to be gone for awhile. As you start the process of getting ready you must completely ignore the dog. If you normally put the dog outside to potty before you leave, do so. But just do the bare mechanics. Do not talk to the dog other than to give direction such as “Go out!”. Do not touch the dog. Do not make eye contact with the dog. When you are ready to walk out the door:

- Go over to the “Binky” and take it off it’s spot. Say good-bye to the “Binky” and then give it to the dog. Don’t throw it. Just offer it to the dog in a very matter-of-fact way. If the dog is not interested just lay the “Binky” on the ground with one last good-bye to it.
- Leave! Be gone for five to ten minutes.
- When you return completely ignore the dog. If the dog jumps on you don’t say a word. Do not touch the dog in anyway. Just start looking for the “Binky”. As you look for it quietly be saying something like “Where is the “Binky”, I want the “Binky”.
- When you locate the “Binky” pick it up with a warm reception. Show it to the dog. If the dog shows an interest you can play with the dog with the “Binky” for 30 seconds or so. Do not lose control of the “Binky”. In playing you must have possession. If the dog does not show an interest in the “Binky” you play with it by yourself. Then return the “Binky” to it’s spot. Continue to ignore the dog for at least another five minutes.

If you contain your dog while gone, like a crate or small room, still go through the above procedures. Just put the dog away at least five minutes before you leave. Then, just before you go out the door, offer the dog the “Binky”. Upon returning, wait at least five minutes before you let the dog out. When you do let the dog out, focus on the “Binky” instead of the dog.

Repeat the above procedure randomly throughout a few days. Vary the amount of time you are actually out of the house. What you want to see happen is that the dog will either start meeting you at the door with the “Binky” or race to it and grab it before you can. When this happens, really play with the dog and the “Binky”. But now the dog is allowed to have possession of the “Binky” while you are playing. Play some tug-of-war, play fetch, play keep away, play any game or combination of games that feels right. But always quit when it is your idea and the dog is still very excited to play. Once again, take the “Binky” to it’s spot and talk to it. Ignore the dog for at least five minutes after the “Binky” game is over.

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STEP #5: INCREASE “BINKY’S” APPEAL, IF NECESSARY. If you have done three to five days of the “Binky” routine and the dog shows no interest in the “Binky”, you may have to up the ante. You might want to try using some type of food. If you are using a kong or tuffy as the “Binky”, stuff it with peanut butter or cheese. If you are using a nylabone try putting a light coating of peanut butter on it. Get creative!!

OCCASIONAL MISTAKES: If you come home and find that the dog has destroyed anything, ignore it. Do not so much as even look at the damage. Just respond with the “Binky” toy routine. After you have ignored the dog for the five minutes after the “Binky” game, put the dog out. Now, with the dog not looking, clean up the mess. By paying attention to any damage, even by severe methods, you have confirmed to the dog that it can get attention for that behavior. You want the dog to learn that it gets positive attention when it engages in the “Binky” routine. Any other behavior will be ignored. If the dog has just destroyed something precious, remember, the damage has already been done. You must stay focused and work to ensure that it won’t happen again.

The concept is: You are building a connection between the fact that you are coming home, and the “Binky”. If the dog is starting to get anxious or excited about you returning, it will now grab the “Binky” instead of one of your favorite shoes. Or, if you have a dog that gets nervous when you leave, it now has the “Binky” as a “pacifier”.

TROUBLESHOOTING If you have done three to five days of the “Binky” If that still does not work, you will have to get real serious and committed. It is not easy, but you will have to stop all attention to the dog for three days. Just meet the dog’s basic requirements. Feed it. Let it out to potty. Put it to bed. Do not talk to it other then to give it direction as when you put it outside. Do not touch it. Do not make eye contact. If the dog comes up to you and touches you, ignore it. This is called No Free Lunches. It has to be a complete ignoring of the dog by the whole family for the three day period. Now, try the “Binky” routine. If the dog still does not respond, you will most likely need professional help to get through the problem behavior.

If the dog is greeting you with the “Binky” but you still are finding chewed items, the problem may be more then just anxiousness about you coming or going. There are many things that can cause a dog to become destructive. You need to note what kind of damage is being done. Not just what is being chewed, but where. For example, if you find things removed from one room and taken to another, this is significant. Other clues:

- Does the dog only chew certain types of things, like items with your scent on them?
- Or does the dog target the kids’ toys?
- Does the behavior happen every time you leave the dog or just occasionally?
- If occasionally, does it happen on a certain day of the week?
- Does it only happen if you leave the dog in the evening?
- Does it happen if the dog hasn’t gotten his meal at a regularly scheduled meal time?
- Does it happen if you leave the house with other people but never when you leave by yourself?

Play detective then call a professional to help you interpret what you have seen. Together, most problems are resolvable.