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## **Object Exchange – Uncomplicated Training! Take this, Not that | Chew this, Drop that Creating a trusting give and take relationship**

All puppies and most adult dogs need to chew and find it pleasurable. Chewing satisfies their inherent need to exercise their jaws and is a good stress reliever. It is as therapeutic for them as relaxing is for us (games, reading, massage, glass of wine, nap, exercise). Dogs who are not allowed to chew can become destructive in other ways.

A puppy teethes from 4 to about 11-months. Chewing helps to relieve sore gums. For adolescents, it helps to balance energy. For older dogs, it is soothing as long as the chew toy accommodates aging teeth and gums.

For new puppy owners, chewing usually isn't the issue. It is what to chew, when and where. Developing healthy chewing habits at a younger age can be a win-win for dog and owner!

Chewing comes naturally for dogs. What to chew and how to give it up when necessary does not. Everything is a chew toy for a dog that hasn't been taught the difference. Too many toys are a waste of time and money. It is like a game of hockey with 4 pucks ... confusing. ***Teaching how to chew and what to chew, without panic, fights or fear, is the goal we are focusing on with Object Exchange.***

Begin early and gently! If you adopt a dog, discover how possessive they are of toys, food and treats first. The safest way to find this out is feeding time. Do **NOT** give them their dog food bowl. **Hold it!** Hand feed one kibble at a time, while asking for a watch-me or sit. Remember, if you feed your dog 2X a day, you have 14 training opportunities a week to teach basic manners like watch-me, sit, down, stay. A couple of minutes can teach a lifetime of patience around food and objects.

Object Exchange is easy, fun and one of the most valuable things you can teach your dog! Take two favorite life rewards (toys, food). If they already have something in their mouth that is appropriate, praise. If it is a slipper or children's toy, hold a legal delicious treat or toy in your hand and offer it to them in exchange. If the dog runs away, do not chase. Simply call and/or walk slowly with something in your hand that is more enticing. You want them to come to you to exchange one for the other. It's the concept of trusting YOU, as the pack leader, letting them know that you are safe! You have something better. If you chase them, you start a game that you will likely lose. If you get angry, you create a situation of scaring a puppy who is having fun with a toy.



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Begin by setting aside a few minutes to teach the concept of take this, give me that. Exchanging one object for another creates a positive, friendly exercise of this is mine and that is yours!

Children, 10 or older, can safely follow-through with this exercise with adult supervision. It will not be meaningful if a young child swings a treat in front of the dog, then throws it or gives it up for free.

Pick two high value rewards for your dog. Kibble, healthy treats or a favorite toy (Frisbee, Ball) work almost all the time. Hold it! Ask for a sit or with new puppies, at least take a breath and get them to watch you -- for a moment of attention.

Being focused, in the present moment, will help to create a healthy give and take without growling, lunging and running away. Do the exchange a few times every day! This teaches the dog that you aren't an ogre or there to end a chew game, just teaching a fair and safe one.

Crate training is excellent especially if you are in a hurry. Fill a Kong toy with kibble, spread a little low fat peanut butter on it, and call the dog to the crate. If they have a toy, ask for it and give them their Kong filled with delicious stuff in the crate. Then, place the toy in too. What a good owner. This safe interaction keeps your dog occupied, helping to balance energy and exercise their jaws.

I don't recommend rawhide unless you are sure of the source. Generally, they are not good as a healthy chew toy. A voracious chewer can shred and swallow them whole.

Better options are available like Nyla and Gumabones and Kong Products. Indestructible hard balls or sports toys like Frisbees work well. [Enrichment toys](#) are excellent, enticing the dog to find their treats. Stuff toys are fine if your dog doesn't shred them to pieces.

People ask about beef or bison marrow bones and bully sticks. This is a choice for each owner. I give my dogs bison marrow bones (cooked) and an occasional bully stick. Know your dog and how they chew. Know their health. When in doubt ask your Veterinarian. Some dogs can crack their teeth. Older dogs may have sensitive stomachs and gums.

**Drop it:** Eventually, your goal is to teach "drop-it." This is so easy. If they drop something, say, "good drop it." The exchange is the same for several practice sessions, holding another high value item, while asking the dog to "drop-it." Teach them to bring their toy to you and drop it.

**Take-it, Leave it!** Integrate take it and leave it into your daily interactions with your dogs. This is a life-saver in the house and outside. Leave it is a powerful tool to keep your dog safe from unmentionables and poisonous items.

**Enjoy the Journey!**