



Using Aversives to Modify Your Dog's Behavior

Aversives are anything your dog will work to avoid. They are unpleasant but should not be painful. Dogs will do what works for them and will not do things that are not rewarding. They do not do things to get revenge, but they will do things that feel good, such as lying on the couch. If the couch is no longer pleasant because it has a mat on it, they will no longer lay on the couch. Aversives are easy to use because you do not have to be around to administer them. If your dog is doing something you would like to stop, use positive reinforcement training when you are at home and aversives when you are gone.

Taste

Dogs obviously have a different sense of taste than us. They can chew on an old shoe all day long without regard to the terrible odor. There are some tastes many dogs will actively avoid.

- Bitter Apple: Bitter Apple is a commercially made product that can be sprayed on cords, rugs and other objects to discourage chewing.
- Cayenne Pepper and Hot Sauce: Most dogs dislike overly spicy foods so powdered chilies or hot sauce can be a deterrent.
- Citronella: Citronella, an ingredient found in insect repellent, also can repel dogs. This is often used in bark collars. Not all insect repellents are non-toxic so look for ones safe for pets.

Texture

Covering an object with an uncomfortable surface will make the area less attractive. They can be a great way of keeping dogs off furniture or a counter.

- Plastic Floor Runners: Non-slip floor runners often have pointy tips on the underside to keep them in place. If these are put upside down on a couch, dogs often will not jump on them or stay on them.
- Shelf Paper: Paper with the sticky side up will keep dogs from keeping their paws on something. Weigh down the paper with a heavy rock or tape it down. Make sure the weight won't fall on the dog.
- Chicken Wire: Burying chicken wire will keep most dogs from digging. Patio stones and heavy rocks will also keep dogs out of certain areas.

Owner Administered Aversives

Aversives can be used while people are present as well. You can use aversives to interrupt your dog's behavior but never to injure them. Startle the dog to stop a behavior and redirect them to a more appropriate activity. The aversives should not make the dog afraid of you if used correctly.

- Spray Bottles: Bottles designed for misting plants can also be used to interrupt bad behavior such as excessive barking or digging. Do not spray the dog directly in the face or use too much force.
- Air Horns: Loud noises distract dogs without applying force. Never aim the noise towards them.
- Shaker Can: Fill an empty soda can with coins to create your own noisemaker. Loudly shake the can to interrupt behavior. Never throw the can at the dog.

Other Aversives

There are commercially made aversives. Many online catalogues and pet stores have products designed to keep dogs out of restricted areas or off furniture. The ScatMat delivers a light electric shock when the dog gets on restricted furniture. These work only on the particular items in your house where the sensor is located. Mousetraps taped upside down under brown paper sacks can also be placed on couches and chairs. Be careful when using any method because there is a risk of injury. Test out every method before using it on your dog. These methods should not be used on fearful or anxious dogs; it will only make their problem worse.