



**Meagan Karnes-San Agustin**  
**The Collared Scholar**  
**Dog Training and Behavior Modification in San Diego**  
[www.collared-scholar.com](http://www.collared-scholar.com)

## **Destructo Dog: How to deal with destructive behaviors**

Have you ever returned from a long day at the office, only to find your house in shambles? Your beloved pooch has had some fun while you were away and has succeeded in ruining some of your favorite items. Perhaps this time, he targeted your favorite pair of shoes, or perhaps the destruction was a bit more severe - a hole in the carpet or a tear in the furniture.

The first step in dealing with this frustrating issue, don't punish him! Dogs live in the moment. To successfully punish a dog for destructive behavior, you must catch that behavior as it's happening. If upon your return home, your pooch is lounging on the couch and rushes over to greet you, your punishment will be directed towards the greeting and will teach your dog to fear your return home.

Rather than punishing your dog for behavior that happened while you were away, the best way to effectively deal with a destructive dog is to understand where the behavior is coming from. There are two major sources of destructive behavior - boredom and separation anxiety. Boredom happens sporadically about the house with most of the destruction occurring several hours after you have left. Separation anxiety on the other hand typically occurs within moments of your departure and consists of destruction centralized around doors or windows.

If you suspect boredom to be the culprit, increase your dog's exercise routine. Add in an early morning jog or teach your dog to use a treadmill. Burning that extra energy will be a huge help. In addition, give your dog mental stimulation by practicing obedience and teaching new commands. Keep sessions short, sweet and fun for your dog. When you leave the house, leave one or two interactive toys that you can fill with Fido's favorite treat to keep him busy for hours. Our favorites are Kong toys, Tug-A-Jug and Bully sticks.

If on the other hand, you feel you might be dealing with an anxious pooch who dreads your departure, start changing your daily cues. If your dog is used to you showering, putting on your clothes, picking up your keys and heading out, desensitize him to these cues by picking up your keys several times throughout the course of the day or by changing your daily routine regularly so he can't pick up on a pattern. In addition, practice quiet hellos and goodbyes. If you get Fido excited every time you leave or return, you are only teaching him that you being gone is a BIG DEAL and you are therefore reinforcing his anxiety. Instead, when you return home, pay him no attention until he is calm and not paying any attention to you. Then you can reward calm behavior with pets and praise. With separation anxiety as with boredom, you can increase exercise, offer mental stimulation and give interactive toys to help prevent destructive behavior.