

Aversives for Dogs

An aversive is something that your dog finds unpleasant (also called punishment). It can be used to discourage the dog from a particular action or place. Aversives are most effective when you also offer a pleasant alternative to the place or action you need your pet to avoid. Please experiment cautiously and sparingly when choosing an aversive as individual responses will vary. Using an aversive that is mildly unpleasant for one dog may be terrifying for another and have no effect on yet another. The goal is to apply the aversive at a level that will cause your dog to avoid the action or place without becoming fearful.

Using Textures as Aversives

Apply these textures to places you need your dog to avoid, and add toys or treats to appropriate places to make them more attractive.

Indoors

- Shelf paper with the sticky side up
- Double-sided carpet tape

Outdoors

- Irregular/sharp rocks set firmly into dirt
- Chicken wire set firmly into dirt with the sharp edges rolled under

Both

- Heavy plastic carpet runner with the pointed side up

You may need to weigh the material firmly or tape it to keep it in place. To protect furniture or floor finishes from sticky substances, attach the aversive material to a piece of foil or heavy plastic and secure that with weights or light tape. Texture aversives are most effective for puppies, small dogs, or low-confidence dogs than for those that won't let a little obstacle stand in their way. Easy-to-attach, commercial varieties of texture aversives are available from most pet supply stores.

Using Tastes as Aversives

Apply these substances to places where your dog's mouth should not be, and offer an appropriate item to chew on instead.

- Bitter Apple or any commercial product that is specifically marketed for taste aversion
- Some hot sauces
- Cayenne pepper
- Citrus odors (colognes, concentrated juices, or fresh peels)
- Aloe gel

Some of these substances may damage furniture or floor finishes, so be sure to test them in a hidden location first. Except for hot sauce and cayenne pepper, these substances should be safe to apply to human skin; however, some individuals may be sensitive to them.

Surprise!

Remote-controlled Aversives:

These items can be used to keep your dog off items, like the couch or counters. They are available at pet supply stores or easy to make at home, and are activated by the dog's behavior, so the owner does not need be present to apply them.

- Motion detector that reacts with a startling sound or a spray of water
- Snappy Trainer, or an upside-down mouse trap that is securely taped under paper to avoid contact
- Aluminum pie plate or cookie sheet containing water, pennies, beans or pebbles – preferably balanced precariously
- Scat Mat (gives a slight static shock)

Human-controlled Aversives:

Use these to interrupt undesirable behaviors, like barking or chewing on furniture; then offer an appropriate alternative. Keep in mind that human-controlled aversives can lead to your dog being afraid of you, or result in your dog still doing the behavior, but when no one is home or in the same room as them.

- Loud air horn
- Whistle
- Shaker can (soda can containing nails, pennies, beans or pebbles, with the opening securely tapes shut)

WARNING: For fearful dogs, do not use aversives. Aversives may do more harm than good! Also, remember to start out with the lowest level aversive first and experiment cautiously to see what works for your pet.