



BEHAVIOR  
SERIES

# Nothing in Life Is Free

## A Training Technique for Dogs

**D**OES YOUR DOG GET ON THE FURNITURE and refuse to get off? Nudge your hand and insist on being petted or played with? Refuse to come when called? Defend his food bowl or toys from you?

If so, a training technique called “nothing in life is free” may be just the solution you’re looking for. “Nothing in life is free” is not a magic pill that will solve a specific behavior problem. Instead, it’s a way of living with your dog that will help him behave better because he trusts and accepts you as his leader and is confident knowing his place in the family.

### How to Practice “Nothing in Life Is Free”

- Use positive reinforcement methods to teach your dog a few commands and tricks. “Sit,” “Down,” and “Stay” are useful commands. “Shake,” “Speak,” and “Roll over” are fun tricks to teach your dog.
- Once your dog has mastered a few commands, you can begin to practice “nothing in life is free.” Before you give your dog anything (food, a treat, a walk, a pat on the head), he must first perform one of the commands he has learned. See the chart below for examples.

- Once you’ve given the command, don’t give your dog what he wants until he does what you want. If he refuses to perform the command, walk away, come back a few minutes later, and start again. If your dog refuses to obey the command, be patient and remember that eventually he will have to obey your command to get what he wants.

Make sure your dog knows the command well and understands what you want before you begin practicing “nothing in life is free.”

### The Benefits of This Technique

- Most dogs assume a neutral or submissive role toward people, but some dogs will challenge their owners for dominance. Requiring a dominant dog to work for everything he wants is a safe, nonconfrontational way to establish control.

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YOU	YOUR DOG
Put your dog’s leash on to go for a walk	Must sit until you’ve put the leash on
Feed your dog	Must lie down and stay until you’ve put the bowl down
Play a game of fetch after work	Must sit and “shake hands” each time you throw the toy
Rub your dog’s belly while watching TV	Must lie down and roll over before being petted

- Dogs who may never display aggressive behavior such as growling, snarling, or snapping may still manage to manipulate you. These dogs may display affectionate behavior that borders on being “pushy,” such as nudging your hand to be petted or “worming” their way onto the furniture to be close to you. This technique gently reminds the dog that he must abide by your rules.
- Fearful dogs may become more confident by obeying commands. Having a strong leader and knowing his place in the hierarchy helps to make the submissive dog feel more secure.

### Why This Technique Works

Animals who live in groups, like dogs, establish a social structure within the group called a dominance hierarchy. This dominance hierarchy serves to maintain order, reduce conflict, and promote cooperation among pack members. To ensure that your home is a safe and happy place for pets and people, the humans in the household should assume the highest positions in the dominance hierarchy. Practicing “nothing in life is free” gently and effectively communicates to your dog that his position in the hierarchy is subordinate to yours.

From your dog’s point of view, children also have a place in this hierarchy. Because children are small and can get down on the dog’s level to play, dogs often consider them to be playmates rather than superiors. With the supervision of an adult, it’s a good idea to encourage children in the household to also practice “nothing in life is free” with the family dog.

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### Related topics at [www.petsforlife.org](http://www.petsforlife.org)

- Positive Reinforcement: Training Your Dog (or Cat!) with Treats and Praise

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# Understanding Aggressive Behavior in Dogs

**A** *DOG'S BARK MAY BE WORSE THAN HIS BITE*, but most of us would rather not find out the hard way. Growling, baring teeth, snarling, snapping, and biting are all aggressive behaviors—but dog aggression includes any behavior meant to intimidate or harm a person or another animal. Although these messages are among the handful of communication tools available to dogs, they're generally unacceptable to humans. Because humans and dogs have different communication systems, misunderstandings can occur between the two species.

But from a dog's perspective, there's always a reason for aggressive behavior. A person may intend to be friendly, but a dog may perceive that person's behavior as threatening or intimidating. Dogs aren't being schizophrenic, psychotic, crazy, or necessarily "vicious" when displaying aggressive behavior.

Because aggression is so complex, and because the potential consequences are so serious, we recommend that you get professional in-home help from an animal-behavior specialist if your dog is displaying aggressive behavior.

## Types of Aggression

### Dominance Aggression

Dominance aggression is motivated by a challenge to a dog's social status or to his control of a social interaction. Dogs are social animals and view their human families as their social group or "pack." Based on the outcomes of social challenges among group members, a dominance hierarchy or "pecking order" is established.

If your dog perceives his own ranking in the hierarchy to be higher than yours, he'll probably challenge you in certain situations. Because people don't always understand canine communication, you may inadvertently

challenge your dog's social position. A dominant-aggressive dog may growl if he is disturbed when resting or sleeping or if he is asked to give up a favorite spot, such as the couch or the bed. Physical restraint, even when done in a friendly manner (like hugging), may also cause your dog to respond aggressively. Reaching for your dog's collar or reaching over his head to pet him could also be interpreted as a challenge for dominance. Dominant-aggressive dogs are often described as "Jekyll and Hydes" because they can be very friendly when not challenged. Dominance aggression may be directed at people or at other animals. The most common reason for fights among dogs in the same family is instability in the dominance hierarchy.

### Fear-Motivated Aggression

Fear-motivated aggression is a defensive reaction and occurs when a dog believes he is in danger of being harmed. Remember that it's your dog's perception of the situation, not your actual intent, which determines your dog's response. For example, you may raise your arm to throw a ball, but your dog may bite you because he believes he's protecting himself from being hit. A dog may also be fearfully aggressive when approached by other dogs.

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## Protective, Territorial, and Possessive Aggression

Protective, territorial, and possessive aggression are all very similar and involve the defense of valuable resources.

**Territorial aggression** is usually associated with defense of property, and that “territory” may extend well past the boundaries of your yard. For example, if you regularly walk your dog around the neighborhood and allow him to urinate, he may think his territory includes the entire block.

**Protective aggression** usually refers to aggression directed toward people or animals whom a dog perceives as threats to his family, or pack. Dogs become **possessively aggressive** when defending their food, toys, or other valued objects, including items as peculiar as tissues stolen from the trash.

## Redirected Aggression

This is a relatively common type of aggression but one that is often misunderstood by pet owners. If a dog is somehow provoked by a person or animal he is unable to attack, he may redirect this aggression onto someone else. For example, two family dogs may become excited and bark and growl in response to another dog passing through the front yard, or two dogs confined behind a fence may turn and attack each other because they can't attack an intruder. Predation is usually considered to be a unique kind of aggressive behavior because it's motivated by the intent to obtain food and not primarily by the intent to harm or intimidate.

## Individual Variation

The likelihood of a dog to show aggressive behavior in any particular situation varies markedly from dog to dog. Some dogs tend to respond aggressively with very little stimulation. Others may be subjected to all kinds of threatening stimuli and events and yet never attempt to bite.

The difference in the threshold prompting aggressive behavior is influenced by both environmental and genetic factors. If this threshold is low, a dog will be more likely to bite. Raising the threshold makes a dog less likely to respond aggressively. This threshold can be raised using behavior modification techniques, but the potential for change is influenced by a dog's gender, age, breed, general temperament, and the way in which the behavior modification techniques are chosen and implemented.

## Related topics at [www.petsforlife.org](http://www.petsforlife.org)

- Dealing with a Dominant Dog

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Because working with aggressive dogs can be potentially dangerous, behavior modification techniques should only be attempted by, or under the guidance of, an experienced animal-behavior professional who understands animal learning theory and behavior.

### What You Can Do

- First, check with your veterinarian to rule out medical causes for the aggressive behavior.
- Seek professional advice. An aggression problem will not go away by itself. Working with aggression problems requires in-home help from an animal-behavior specialist.
- Take precautions. Your first priority is to keep people and other animals safe. Supervise, confine, or restrict your dog's activities until you can obtain professional guidance. You are liable for your dog's behavior. If you must take your dog out in public, consider a cage-type muzzle as a temporary precaution, and remember that some dogs are clever enough to get a muzzle off.
- Avoid exposing your dog to situations where he is more likely to show aggression. You may need to keep him confined to a safe room and limit his contact with people.
- If your dog is possessive of toys or treats, or territorial in certain locations, prevent access and you'll prevent the problem. In an emergency, bribe him with something better than what he has. For example, if he steals your shoe, trade him the shoe for a piece of chicken.
- Spay or neuter your dog. Intact dogs are more likely to display dominance, territorial, and protective aggressive behavior.

### What NOT to Do

- Punishment won't help and, in fact, will often make the problem worse. If the aggression is motivated by fear, punishment will make your dog more fearful, and therefore more aggressive. Attempting to punish or dominate a dominant-aggressive dog may actually lead him to escalate his behavior to retain his dominant position. This is likely to result in a bite or a severe attack. Punishing territorial, possessive, or protective aggression is likely to elicit additional defensive aggression.
- Don't encourage aggressive behavior. Playing tug-of-war or wrestling games encourages your dog to attempt to “best” you or “win” over you, which can lead to a dominance aggression problem. When dogs are encouraged to “go get ‘em” or to bark and dash about in response to outside noises or the approach of a person, territorial and protective aggressive behavior may result.

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# Solving Barking Problems

## BEHAVIOR SERIES

**IF YOU EVER WONDER** if your dog's bark is worse than his proverbial bite, the answer may lie no further than your next-door neighbor. Some canine behavior problems, such as house soiling, affect only a dog's family. But problems such as escaping and excessive barking can result in neighborhood disputes and violations of animal control ordinances, and that means problems with your pet can soon become "people problems."

## Learn Why Your Dog Barks

If your dog's "talkative nature" has created tension with your neighbors, then it's a good idea to discuss the problem with them. It's perfectly normal and reasonable for dogs to bark from time to time, just as children make noise when they play outside. But continual barking for long periods of time is a symptom of a problem that needs addressing—from the perspectives of your neighbors *and* your dog.

First, determine when and for how long your dog barks and what causes him to bark. You may need to do some clever detective work to obtain this information, especially if the barking occurs when you're not home. Ask your neighbors what they see and hear, drive or walk around the block and watch and listen for a while, or start a tape recorder or video camera when you leave for work. With a little effort you should be able to find out which of the common problems discussed below is the cause of your dog's barking.

### Social Isolation/Frustration/Attention-Seeking

Your dog may be barking out of boredom and loneliness if:

- He's left alone for long periods of time without opportunities to interact with you.
- His environment is relatively barren, without companions or toys.
- He's a puppy or adolescent (under three years old) and doesn't have other outlets for his energy.
- He's a particularly active type of dog (like the herding or sporting breeds) who needs to be occupied to be happy.

### Recommendations

Expand your dog's world and increase his "people time" in the following ways:

- Walk your dog at least twice daily—it's good exercise, both mentally and physically. Walks should be more than just "potty breaks."
- Teach your dog to fetch a ball or Frisbee® and practice with him as often as possible.
- Teach your dog a few commands or tricks and practice them every day for five to 10 minutes.
- Take a dog training class with your dog. This allows you and your dog to work together toward a common goal.
- To help fill the hours that you're not home, provide safe, interesting toys to keep your dog busy, such as Kong®-type toys filled with treats or busy-box toys. Rotating the toys will make them seem new and interesting.
- If your dog is barking to get your attention, make sure he has sufficient time with you on a daily basis (petting, grooming, playing, exercising).
- Keep your dog inside when you're unable to supervise him.
- Let your neighbors know that you are actively working on the problem.
- If your dog is well socialized and you have your employer's permission, take your dog to work with you every now and then.
- When you have to leave your dog for extended periods of time, take him to a "doggie day care center," hire a pet sitter or dog walker, or have a trusted friend or neighbor walk and play with him.

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## Territorial/Protective Behavior

Your dog may be barking to guard his territory if:

- The barking occurs in the presence of “intruders,” which may include the mail carrier, children walking to school, and other dogs or neighbors in adjacent yards.
- Your dog’s posture while he’s barking appears threatening—tail held high and ears up and forward.
- You’ve encouraged your dog to be responsive to people and noises outside.

### Recommendations

- Teach your dog a “quiet” command. When he begins to bark at a passerby, allow two or three barks, then say “quiet” and interrupt his barking by shaking a can filled with pennies or squirting water at his mouth with a spray bottle or water squirt gun. His surprise should cause him to stop barking momentarily. While he’s quiet, say “good quiet” and pop a tasty treat into his mouth. Remember, the loud noise or water squirt isn’t meant to punish him; rather it’s to distract him into being quiet so you can reward him. If your dog is frightened by the noise or squirt bottle, find an alternative method of interrupting his barking (perhaps throw a toy or ball near him).
- Desensitize your dog to the stimulus that triggers the barking. Teach him that the people he views as intruders are actually friends and that good things happen to him when these people are around. Ask someone to walk by your yard, starting far enough away so that your dog isn’t barking, then reward quiet behavior and correct responses to a “sit” or “down” command with special treats such as little pieces of cheese. As the person gradually comes closer, continue to reward your dog’s quiet behavior. It may take several sessions before the person can come close without your dog barking. When the person can come very close without your dog barking, have him feed your dog a treat or throw a toy for him.
- If your dog barks while inside the house when you’re home, call him to you, have him obey a command such as “sit” or “down,” and reward him with praise and a treat. Don’t encourage this type of barking by enticing your dog to bark at things he hears or sees outside. Remember to pay attention to your dog when he’s being quiet too, so that he comes to associate such behavior with attention and praise.
- Have your dog spayed or neutered to decrease territorial behavior.

## Fears and Phobias

Your dog’s barking may be a response to something he’s afraid of if:

- The barking occurs when he’s exposed to loud noises, such as thunderstorms, firecrackers, or construction noise.
- Your dog’s posture indicates fear—ears back, tail held low.

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## Recommendations

Identify what’s frightening your dog and desensitize him to it. You may need professional help with the desensitization process. Talk to your veterinarian about anti-anxiety medication while you work on behavior modification. During thunderstorms or other frightening times, mute noise from outside by leaving your dog in a comfortable area in a basement or windowless bathroom, and turn on a television, radio, or loud fan. Block your dog’s access to outdoor views that might be causing a fear response by closing curtains or doors to certain rooms. Avoid coddling your dog so that he doesn’t think that he is being rewarded for his fearful behavior.

## Separation Anxiety

Your dog may be barking due to separation anxiety if:

- The barking occurs only when you’re gone and starts as soon as, or shortly after, you leave.
- Your dog displays other behaviors that reflect a strong attachment to you, such as following you from room to room, greeting you frantically, or reacting anxiously whenever you prepare to leave.
- Your dog has recently experienced a change in the family’s schedule that means he’s left alone more often; a move to a new house; the death or loss of a family member or another family pet; or a period at an animal shelter or boarding kennel.

### Recommendations

Some cases of separation anxiety can be resolved using counterconditioning and desensitization techniques. Successful treatment for some cases may also require the use of medication prescribed by your veterinarian. (See our “Separation Anxiety” fact sheet for more information.)

## Bark Collars

There are several types of bark collars on the market, and we generally don’t recommend them. The main drawback of any bark collar is that it doesn’t address the underlying cause of the barking. You may be able to eliminate the barking, but symptom substitution may occur and your dog may begin digging or escaping, or become destructive or even aggressive. A bark collar must be used in conjunction with behavior modification that addresses the reason for the barking, as outlined above. You should never use a bark collar on your dog if his barking is due to separation anxiety or fears or phobias because punishment always makes fear and anxiety behaviors worse.

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# Crate Training Your Dog

## BEHAVIOR SERIES

**I F YOU LIKE NOTHING BETTER** than coming home from a hard day's work and finding that your dog decided to "go" on the couch or use your favorite slippers as a new chew toy, then crate training isn't for you. But if you're like most people, then using a crate to properly train your dog will be time well spent.

Crate training takes some time and effort, but it is a proven way to help train dogs who act inappropriately without knowing any better. If you have a new dog or puppy, you can use the crate to limit his access to the house until he learns all the house rules—like what he can and can't chew on and where he can and can't eliminate. A crate is also a safe way of transporting your dog in the car or taking him places where he may not be welcome to run freely. If you properly train your dog to use the crate, he'll think of it as his safe place and will be happy to spend time there when needed.

### Selecting a Crate

Crates may be plastic (often called "flight kennels") or collapsible, metal pens. They come in different sizes and can be purchased at most pet supply stores. Your dog's crate should be just large enough for him to stand up and turn around in. If your dog is still growing, choose a crate that will accommodate his adult size. Block off the excess crate space so your dog can't eliminate at one end and retreat to the other.

### The Crate Training Process

Crate training can take days or weeks, depending on your dog's age, temperament, and past experiences. It's important to keep two things in mind while crate training: The crate should always be associated with something pleasant, and training should take place in a series of small steps. Don't go too fast.

#### **Step 1: Introducing Your Dog to the Crate**

- Place the crate in an area of your house where the family spends a lot of time, such as the family room. Put a soft blanket or towel in the crate. Bring your dog over to the

crate and talk to him in a happy tone of voice. Make sure the crate door is open and secured so that it won't hit your dog and frighten him.

- To encourage your dog to enter the crate, drop some small food treats nearby, then just inside the door, and finally, all the way inside the crate. If he refuses to go all the way in at first, that's okay; don't force him to enter. Continue tossing treats into the crate until your dog will walk calmly all the way into the crate to get the food. If he isn't interested in treats, try tossing a favorite toy in the crate. This step may take a few minutes or as long as several days.

#### **Step 2: Feeding Your Dog His Meals in the Crate**

- After introducing your dog to the crate, begin feeding him his regular meals near it. This will create a pleasant association with the crate. If your dog is readily entering the crate when you begin Step 2, place the food dish all the way at the back of the crate. If your dog remains reluctant to enter the crate, put the dish only as far inside as he will readily go without becoming fearful or anxious. Each time you feed him, place the dish a little further back in the crate.
- Once your dog is standing comfortably in the crate to eat his meal, you can close the door while he's eating. The first time you do this, open the door as soon as he finishes his meal. With each successive feeding, leave the door closed a few minutes longer, until he's staying in the crate for 10 minutes or so after eating. If he begins to whine to be let out, you may have increased the length of time too quickly. Next time, try leaving him in the crate for a shorter time period. If he does whine or cry in the crate, it's imperative that you not let him out until he stops. Otherwise, he'll learn that the way to get out of the crate is to whine, so he'll keep doing it.

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### **Step 3: Conditioning Your Dog to the Crate for Longer Time Periods**

- After your dog is eating his regular meals in the crate with no sign of fear or anxiety, you can confine him there for short time periods while you're home. Call him over to the crate and give him a treat. Give him a command to enter, such as "kennel." Encourage him by pointing to the inside of the crate with a treat in your hand. After your dog enters the crate, praise him, give him the treat, and close the door. Sit quietly near the crate for five to 10 minutes and then go into another room for a few minutes. Return, sit quietly again for a short time, then let him out of the crate.
- Repeat this process several times a day. With each repetition, gradually increase the length of time you leave him in the crate and the length of time you're out of his sight. Once your dog will stay quietly in the crate for about 30 minutes with you out of sight the majority of the time, you can begin leaving him crated when you're gone for short time periods or letting him sleep there at night. This may take several days or several weeks.

### **Step 4, Part A: Crating Your Dog When Left Alone**

- After your dog can spend about 30 minutes in the crate without becoming anxious or afraid, you can begin leaving him crated for short periods when you leave the house. Put him in the crate using your regular command and a treat. You might also want to leave him with a few safe toys in the crate. You'll want to vary at what point in your "getting ready to leave" routine you put your dog in the crate. Although he shouldn't be crated for a long time before you leave, you can crate him anywhere from five to 20 minutes prior to leaving.
- Don't make your departures emotional and prolonged but matter-of-fact. Praise your dog briefly, give him a treat for entering the crate, and then leave quietly. When you return home, don't reward your dog for excited behavior by responding to him in an excited, enthusiastic way. Keep arrivals low-key to avoid increasing his anxiety. Continue to crate your dog for short periods from time to time when you're home so he doesn't associate crating with being left alone.

### **Step 4, Part B: Crating Your Dog at Night**

- Put your dog in the crate using your regular command and a treat. Initially, it may be a good idea to put the crate in your bedroom or nearby in a hallway, especially if you have a puppy. Puppies often need to go outside to eliminate during the night, and you'll want to be able to hear your puppy when he whines to be let outside.

### **Related topics at [www.petsforlife.org](http://www.petsforlife.org)**

- Dog Toys and How to Use Them
- Reducing Separation Anxiety in Dogs

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- Older dogs, too, should initially be kept nearby so that they don't associate the crate with social isolation. Once your dog is sleeping comfortably through the night with his crate near you, you can begin to gradually move it to the location you prefer, although time spent with your dog—even sleep time—is a chance to strengthen the bond between you and your pet.

### **Potential Problems**

#### **Too Much Time in the Crate**

A crate isn't a magical solution. If not used correctly, a dog can feel trapped and frustrated. For example, if your dog is crated all day while you're at work and then crated again all night, he's spending too much time in too small a space. Other arrangements should be made to meet his physical and emotional needs. Also remember that puppies under six months of age shouldn't stay in a crate for more than three or four hours at a time. They can't control their bladders and bowels for longer periods.

#### **Whining**

If your dog whines or cries while in the crate at night, it may be difficult to determine whether he's whining to be let out of the crate or whether he needs to be let outside to eliminate. If you've followed the training procedures outlined above, then your dog hasn't been rewarded for whining in the past by being released from his crate. If that is the case, try to ignore the whining. If your dog is just testing you, he'll probably stop whining soon. Yelling at him or pounding on the crate will only make things worse.

If the whining continues after you've ignored him for several minutes, use the phrase he associates with going outside to eliminate. If he responds and becomes excited, take him outside. This should be a trip with a purpose, not playtime. If you're convinced that your dog doesn't need to eliminate, the best response is to ignore him until he stops whining. Don't give in; if you do, you'll teach your dog to whine loud and long to get what he wants. If you've progressed gradually through the training steps and haven't done too much too fast, you'll be less likely to encounter this problem. If the problem becomes unmanageable, you may need to start the crate training process over again.

#### **Separation Anxiety**

Attempting to use the crate as a remedy for separation anxiety won't solve the problem. A crate may prevent your dog from being destructive, but he may injure himself in an attempt to escape from the crate. Separation anxiety problems can only be resolved with counterconditioning and desensitization procedures. You may want to consult a professional animal-behavior specialist.

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# Dogs: Destructive Chewing

**S**OONER OR LATER EVERY DOG LOVER returns home to find some unexpected damage inflicted by his or her dog... or, more specifically, that dog's incisors and molars. Although dogs make great use of their vision and sense of smell to explore the world, one of their favorite ways to take in new information is to put their mouths to work.

Fortunately, chewing can be directed onto appropriate items so your dog isn't destroying items you value or jeopardizing his own safety. Until he's learned what he can and can't chew, however, you need to manage the situation as much as possible so he doesn't have the opportunity to chew on unacceptable objects.

## Taking Control by Managing the Situation

- Take responsibility for your own belongings: If you don't want it in your dog's mouth, don't make it available. Keep clothing, shoes, books, trash, eyeglasses, and remote control devices out of your dog's reach.
- Don't confuse your dog by offering him shoes and socks as toys and then expecting him to distinguish between his shoe and yours. Your dog's toys should be clearly distinguishable from household goods.
- Until your dog learns the house rules, confine him when you're unable to keep an eye on him. Choose a "safe place" that's dog proof, and provide fresh water and "safe" toys. If your dog is crate trained, you may also place him in his crate for short periods of time.
- Give your dog plenty of your time and attention. Your dog won't know how to behave if you don't teach him alternatives to inappropriate behavior, and he can't learn these when he's in the yard by himself.
- If you catch your dog chewing on something he shouldn't, interrupt the behavior with a loud noise, offer him an acceptable chew toy instead, and praise him lavishly when he takes the toy in his mouth.
- Have realistic expectations. At some point your dog will inevitably chew up something you value; this is often part of the transition to a new home. Your dog needs time to learn the house rules and you need to remember to take precautions and keep things out of his reach.

Chewing is normal behavior for curious puppies who may be teething, but adult dogs may engage in destructive chewing for any number of reasons. In order to deal with the behavior, you must first determine why your dog is chewing—and remember, he's not doing it to spite you.

## Play, Boredom, or Social Isolation

Normal play behavior sometimes leads to destruction, as it may involve digging, chewing, shredding, or shaking objects. Because dogs investigate objects by pawing at them and exploring them with their mouths, they may also inadvertently damage items in their environment. Your dog may be chewing for entertainment if:

- He's left alone for long periods without opportunities to interact with you.
- His environment is relatively barren, lacking playmates or toys.
- He's a puppy or adolescent (under three years old) and he doesn't have other outlets for his energy.
- He's a particularly active type of dog (like the herding or sporting breeds) who needs to be occupied to be happy.

## Solutions

- Play with your dog daily in a safe, fenced-in area. Playing fetch is a great way to use up your dog's excess energy without wearing you out!
- Go for a walk. Walks should be more than just "bathroom time." On-leash walks are important opportunities for you and your dog to be together. Allow time for sniffing, exploring, instruction, and praise.
- Increase your dog's opportunities for mental stimulation. Teach your dog a few commands or tricks and practice them daily. Take a dog training class; not only are they fun, but such classes teach commands important for your dog's safety and give you and your dog time to work toward a common goal.
- Provide your dog with lots of appropriate toys.
- Rotate your dog's toys to refresh his interest in them. "New" toys are always more interesting than old ones.

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- Try different kinds of toys, but when you introduce a new toy, keep an eye on your dog to make sure he won't tear it up and ingest the pieces.
- Consider the various types of toys that can be stuffed with food. Putting tidbits of food inside chew toys helps your dog focus on these toys rather than on unacceptable objects.
- Make your dog's favorite off-limits chew objects unattractive to him by covering them with heavy plastic, aluminum foil, hot pepper sauce, or a commercial "anti-chew" product.
- Consider a good "doggie day care" program for two or three days a week to help your dog work off some of his excess energy.

## Separation Anxiety

Dogs with separation anxiety tend to display behaviors that reflect a strong attachment to their owners. This includes following you from room to room, frantic greetings, and anxious responses whenever you prepare to leave the house. Factors that can precipitate a separation anxiety problem include:

- A change in the family's schedule that leaves your dog alone more often.
- A move to a new home.
- The death or loss of a family member or another family pet.
- A period at a shelter or boarding kennel.

Again, remember that these behaviors are not motivated by spite or revenge, but by anxiety. Punishment will only make the problem worse. Separation anxiety can be resolved by using counterconditioning and desensitization techniques.

## Attention-Seeking Behavior

Without realizing it, we often pay more attention to our dogs when they're misbehaving. Dogs who don't receive a lot of attention and reinforcement for appropriate behavior may engage in destructive behavior when their owners are present as a way to attract attention—even if the attention is "negative," such as a verbal scolding.

### Solutions

- Make sure your dog gets a lot of positive attention every day—playtime, walks, grooming, or just petting.

## Related topics at [www.petsforlife.org](http://www.petsforlife.org)

- Dog Toys and How to Use Them
- Helping Your Dog Overcome Fear of Thunder and Other Startling Noises
- "Nothing in Life Is Free": A Training Technique for Dogs
- Reducing Separation Anxiety in Dogs
- Using Aversives to Modify Your Dog's Behavior

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- Ignore bad behavior (as much as possible) and reward good behavior. Remember to reward your dog with praise and petting when he's playing quietly with appropriate toys.
- Make his favorite off-limits chew objects unattractive or unavailable to him. Use aversives on objects that cannot be put away.
- Teach your dog a "drop it" command, so that when he does pick up an off-limits object, you can use the command and praise him for complying. The best way to teach "drop it" is to practice exchanging a toy in his possession for a tidbit of food.
- Practice the concept of "Nothing in Life Is Free" with your dog. This gets your dog in the habit of complying with your commands and is a good way to make sure he gets lots of positive attention for doing the right things.

## Fears and Phobias

Your dog's destructive behavior may be a response to something he fears. Some dogs are afraid of loud noises. Your dog's destructive behavior may be caused by fear if he tends to be more destructive when he's exposed to loud noises, such as thunderstorms, firecrackers, or construction sounds, and if the primary damage is to doors, doorframes, window coverings, screens, or walls.

### Solutions

- Provide a "safe place" for your dog. Find out where he likes to go when he feels anxious, then allow access to that space or create a similar one for him to use when the fear stimulus is present.
- Don't comfort your dog when he's behaving fearfully. Try to get him to play with you or respond to commands he knows and give him praise and treats when he responds to you rather than the fear stimulus.
- Don't crate your dog unless he's thoroughly crate trained and considers the crate his safe place. If you put him in a crate to prevent destruction and he's not crate trained, he may injure himself or destroy the crate.

## What NOT to Do

Punishment is rarely effective in resolving destructive behavior problems and may even make the problem worse. Never discipline your dog after the fact. If you discover your dog has chewed an item but don't catch him in the act, it's too late to administer a correction. Your dog doesn't think, "I chewed those shoes an hour ago and that's why I'm being scolded now." People often believe their dog makes this connection because he runs and hides or "looks guilty." But dogs display submissive postures like cowering, running away, or hiding when they feel threatened by an angry tone of voice, body posture, or facial expression. Your dog doesn't know what he's done wrong; he only knows that you're upset. Punishment after the fact will not only fail to eliminate the undesirable behavior, but may also provoke other undesirable behaviors.

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BEHAVIOR  
SERIES

# How to Stop Your Dog from Digging

**DIG BECAUSE I CAN.** It's the motto of dogs everywhere, and completely normal behavior.

Yet the reasons behind the activity are varied. Your dog may dig to seek entertainment, attention, comfort, escape, prey, or protection. (Despite how you might feel sometimes, your dog won't dig out of spite, revenge, or a desire to destroy your yard.) And just when you think you've outsmarted your pooch by finding ways to make the area where he digs unappealing, your dog will likely begin digging in other locations or display other unacceptable behavior, such as chewing or barking.

A more effective approach to the problem is to address the cause of the digging. Here's advice on how to figure out *why* your dog digs—and how to stop it.

## Seeking Entertainment

Dogs may dig as a form of self-play when they learn that roots and soil “play back.” Your dog may be digging for entertainment if:

- He's left alone in the yard for long periods of time without opportunities for interaction with you or others.
- His environment is relatively barren—with no playmates or toys.
- He's a puppy or adolescent (under three years old) and doesn't have other outlets for his energy.
- He's the type of dog that is bred to dig as part of his “job” (such as a terrier).

- He's a particularly active type of dog who needs an active job to be happy (such as a herding or sporting breed).
- He's recently seen you “playing” in the dirt (gardening or working in the yard).

## Recommendations

Expand your dog's world and increase his “people time” in the following ways:

- Walk your dog at least twice daily. It's good exercise for both of you—mentally and physically!
- Teach your dog to fetch a ball or Frisbee®, and play with him as often as possible.
- Teach your dog a few commands or tricks. Practice these commands/tricks every day for five to 10 minutes.
- Take a training class with your dog and practice daily what you've learned.
- Keep interesting toys in the yard to keep your dog busy even when you're not around. Kong®-type toys filled with treats or busy-box dog toys work especially well. Rotate the toys to make them seem new and interesting.
- For dedicated diggers, provide an “acceptable digging area.” Choose an area of the yard where it's okay for your dog to dig, and cover that area with loose soil or sand. If you catch your dog digging in an unacceptable area, interrupt the behavior with a loud noise and say, “No dig.” Then immediately take the dog to his designated

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digging area. When he digs in the approved spot, reward him with praise. Make the unacceptable digging spots unattractive (at least temporarily) by setting rocks or chicken wire into the dirt. Make the acceptable area attractive by burying safe items for him to discover.

## Seeking Prey

Dogs may try to pursue burrowing animals or insects that live in your yard. Your dog may be pursuing prey if:

- The digging is in a specific area instead of at the boundaries of the yard.
- The digging is at the roots of trees or shrubs.
- The digging is in a “path” layout.

### Recommendations

- Search for possible signs of burrowing animals or insects and then make your yard unwelcome to them. Avoid methods that could be toxic or dangerous to your pets or other animals. For advice on dealing humanely with wildlife, visit [www.wildneighbors.org](http://www.wildneighbors.org).

## Seeking Comfort or Protection

In hot weather, dogs may dig holes to lie in the cool dirt. They may also dig to provide themselves with shelter from cold, wind, or rain, or to try to find water. Your dog may be digging for comfort or protection if:

- The holes are near foundations of buildings, large shade trees, or a water source.
- Your dog doesn't have a shelter or his shelter is exposed to the hot sun or cold winds.
- Your dog is lying in the holes he digs.

### Recommendations

Provide your dog with the comfort or protection he seeks:

- Provide an insulated doghouse. Make sure it affords protection from wind and sun.
- If your dog still prefers a hole in the ground, try providing an “approved digging area” as described above. Make sure the allowed digging area is in a spot that is protected from the elements.
- Provide plenty of fresh water in a bowl that can't be tipped over.

## Related topics at [www.petsforlife.org](http://www.petsforlife.org)

- The Canine Escape Artist
- Using Aversives to Modify Your Dog's Behavior

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## Seeking Attention

Any behavior can become attention-getting behavior if the dog learns that he receives attention for engaging in it. (Even punishment is a form of attention.) Your dog may be digging to get attention if:

- He digs in your presence.
- His other opportunities for interaction with you are limited.

### Recommendations

- Don't give your dog attention for digging. Remember, even punishment is attention.
- Make sure your dog has sufficient time with you on a daily basis. That way, he doesn't have to resort to “misbehaving” to get your attention.

## Seeking Escape

Dogs may escape to get to something, to get somewhere, or to get away from something. Your dog may be digging to escape if:

- He digs along the fence line.
- He digs under the fence.

### Recommendations

Use the following methods to keep your dog in the yard while you work on the behavior modifications described in our handout “The Canine Escape Artist.”

- Bury chicken wire at the base of the fence. Be sure to roll the sharp edges away from your yard.
- Place large rocks, partially buried, along the bottom of the fence line.
- Bury the bottom of the fence one to two feet below the surface.
- Lay chain-link fencing on the ground (anchored to the bottom of the fence) to make it uncomfortable for your dog to walk near the fence.

### Regardless of the Reason for Digging, We Don't Recommend

- Punishment after the fact. This will not address the cause of the behavior, and in fact it will worsen any digging that's motivated by fear or anxiety. Punishment may also cause anxiety in dogs who aren't currently fearful.
- Staking a dog near a hole he's dug or filling the hole with water. These techniques address neither the cause of the behavior nor the act of digging.

Finally, if you've tried all these suggestions and still can't solve your dog's digging problem, then keep him indoors with you, and be sure to supervise your dog during bathroom breaks.

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BEHAVIOR  
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# Dog Toys and How to Use Them

**F**OR DOGS AND OTHER ANIMAL COMPANIONS, toys are not a luxury, but a necessity. Toys help fight boredom in dogs left alone, and toys can even help prevent some problem behaviors from developing.

Although cats can be pretty picky when it comes to enjoying particular toys—ignoring a \$10 catnip mouse and marveling over a piece of crumpled newsprint—dogs are often more than willing to play with any object they can get their paws on. That means you'll need to be particularly careful when monitoring your dog's playtime to prevent any "unscheduled" activities.

## "Safe" Toys

Many factors contribute to the safety or danger of a toy, and a number of them depend upon your dog's size, activity level, and preferences. Another factor is the environment in which your dog spends his time. Although we can't guarantee your dog's enthusiasm or his safety with any specific toy, we can offer the following guidelines.

### Be Cautious

The things that are usually most attractive to dogs are often the very things that are the most dangerous. Dog-proof your home by safely storing string, ribbon, rubber bands, children's toys, pantyhose, and anything else that could be ingested.

Toys should be appropriate for your dog's size. Balls and other toys that are too small can easily be swallowed or become lodged in your dog's throat.

Avoid or alter any toys that aren't "dog proof" by removing ribbons, strings, eyes, or other parts that

could be chewed or ingested. Discard toys that start to break into pieces or have pieces torn off. You should also avoid "tug-of-war" games with dogs who have dominant personalities. (Such games between dogs are usually fine.)

Ask your veterinarian which rawhide toys are safe and which aren't. Unless your veterinarian says otherwise, "chewies" like hooves, pig's ears, and rawhides should only be played with under your supervision. Very hard rubber toys are safer and last longer.

Take note of any toy that contains a "squeaker" buried in its center. Your dog may feel that he must find and destroy the source of the squeaking, and he could ingest it—in which case squeaking objects should also be used under your supervision.

Check labels for child safety. Look for stuffed toys that are labeled as safe for children under three years of age and that don't contain any dangerous fillings. Problem fillings include things like nutshells and polystyrene beads, but even "safe" stuffings aren't truly digestible. Remember that soft toys are not indestructible, but some are sturdier than others. Soft toys should be machine washable.

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## Recommended Toys

### Active Toys

Very hard rubber toys, such as Nylabone®-type products and Kong®-type products, are available in a variety of shapes and sizes and are fun for chewing and for carrying around.

“Rope” toys are usually available in a “bone” shape with knotted ends.

Tennis balls make great dog toys, but keep an eye out for any that could be chewed through, and discard them.

### Distraction Toys

Kong-type toys, especially when filled with broken-up treats—or, even better, a mixture of broken-up treats and peanut butter—can keep a puppy or dog busy for hours. Only by chewing diligently can your dog get to the treats, and then only in small bits. Double-check with your veterinarian about whether or not you should give peanut butter to your dog. Be sure to choose a Kong-type toy of appropriate size for your dog.

“Busy-box” toys are large rubber cubes with hiding places for treats. Only by moving the cube around with his nose, mouth, and paws can your dog get to the goodies.

### Comfort Toys

Soft stuffed toys are good for several purposes but aren't appropriate for all dogs. For some dogs, the stuffed toy should be small enough to carry around. For dogs who want to shake or “kill” the toy, the toy should be the size that “prey” would be for that size dog (mouse-size, rabbit-size, or duck-size).

Dirty laundry, such as an old t-shirt, pillowcase, towel, or blanket, can be very comforting to a dog, especially if the item smells like you! Be forewarned that the item could be destroyed by industrious fluffing, carrying, and nosing.

## Get the Most out of Toys!

- Rotate your dog's toys weekly by making only a few toys available at a time. Keep a variety of types easily accessible. If your dog has a favorite, like a soft “baby,” you may want to leave it out all the time.
- Provide toys that offer variety—at least one toy to carry, one to “kill,” one to roll, and one to “baby.”
- Hide-and-seek is a fun game for dogs. “Found” toys are often much more attractive than a toy which is obviously introduced. Making an interactive game out of finding toys or treats is a good “rainy-day” activity for your dog, using up energy without the need for a lot of space.
- Many of your dog's toys should be interactive. Interactive play is very important for your dog because he needs active “people time”—and such play also enhances the bond between you and your pet. By focusing on a specific task—such as repeatedly returning a ball, Kong, or Frisbee®, or playing hide-and-seek with treats or toys—your dog can expel pent-up mental and physical energy in a limited amount of time and space. This greatly reduces stress due to confinement, isolation, and boredom. For young, high-energy, and untrained dogs, interactive play also offers an opportunity for socialization and helps them learn about appropriate and inappropriate behavior, such as jumping up or being mouthy.

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BEHAVIOR  
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# Dealing with a Dominant Dog

**F**OR SOME PEOPLE, the phrase “top dog” isn’t just a saying. It actually describes their dogs. If you’ve got a dog who likes to boss you (or others) around, chances are you’ve got a dominance aggression problem in your household—a problem that could endanger you, your family, and others.

Most dogs assume a neutral or submissive role toward people, but some dogs will challenge their owners for dominance. A dominant dog may stare, bark, growl, snap, or even bite when you give him a command or ask him to give up a toy, treat, or resting place. Sometimes even hugging, petting, or grooming can be interpreted as gestures of dominance and, therefore, provoke a growl or snap—and this is true even though your dog may still be very affectionate and often solicit petting and attention from you.

To understand why your dog behaves in these ways, it’s important to know some things about canine social systems. Animals who live in social groups, including wolves and domestic dogs, establish a social structure called a dominance hierarchy within their group. This hierarchy serves to maintain order, reduce conflict, and promote cooperation among group members. A position within the dominance hierarchy is established by each member of the group, based on the outcomes of interactions between themselves and the other pack members. The more dominant animals can control access to valued items such as food, den sites, and mates. For domestic dogs, valued items might be food, toys, sleeping or resting places, and attention from their owners.

For your home to be a safe and happy place for pets and people, it’s best that the humans in the household assume the highest positions in the dominance hierarchy, particularly with dominant dogs.

## Is Your Dog Dominant?

You may have a dominance issue with your dog if he:

- Resists obeying well-known commands.
- Won’t move out of your way when required.
- Nudges your hand, mouths your arm, or insists on being petted or played with—in other words, he “orders” you to obey.
- Defends food, toys, or other objects from you.
- Growls or bares teeth under any circumstances.
- Resists handling by you, the veterinarian, or the groomer.
- Gets up on furniture without permission and won’t get down.
- Snaps at you.

## What to Do If You Recognize Signs of Dominance in Your Dog

If you recognize the beginning signs of dominance aggression in your dog, consult an animal-behavior specialist immediately. Avoid using any form of physical punishment on your dog. Getting physical with a dominant dog may cause the dog to intensify his aggression, posing the risk of injury to you.

If your dog has shown signs of dominance aggression, take the following precautions to ensure the safety of your family and others who may encounter your dog:

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- Avoid situations that bring out the aggressive behavior.
- Back off and use “happy talk” to relieve the intensity of situations in which your dog acts aggressively.
- Supervise, confine, or restrict your dog’s activities as necessary, especially when children or other pets are present.
- Use a head halter or muzzle to help control your dog when you’re outdoors. Brand names of head halters include Gentle Leader, Promise Collar, or Halti.
- When you’re indoors with your dog, control access to parts of the home by using baby gates or by crating your dog. You can also use a cage-type muzzle, head halter, or leash for control purposes—but do so only when you can closely supervise your dog.

Dominance aggression problems are unlikely to go away without your taking steps to resolve them. Because dominant-aggressive dogs can be potentially dangerous, treatment of dominance aggression problems should always be supervised by an animal-behavior specialist.

### Becoming the Leader of the Pack

Use the following techniques—none of which requires a physical confrontation with your dog—to help you gain some control over your dog and establish yourself as the “pack leader”:

- Spay or neuter your dog to reduce hormonal contributions to aggression. Understand that after a mature animal has been spayed or neutered, it may take time for those hormones to clear from the body. In some cases, long-standing behavior patterns may continue even after the hormones or other causes no longer exist.
- Use a training technique called “Nothing in Life Is Free” to establish your leadership in a safe, nonconfrontational way. This technique requires your dog to “work” for everything he gets from you. Have your dog obey at least one command (such as “sit”) before you pet him, give him dinner, put on his leash, or throw him a toy. If your dog doesn’t know any commands or doesn’t perform them reliably, you’ll first have to teach him, using positive reinforcement techniques, and practice with him daily.

### Related topics at [www.petsforlife.org](http://www.petsforlife.org)

- How to Use a Head Halter
- Nothing in Life Is Free: A Training Technique for Dogs
- Positive Reinforcement: Training Your Dog (or Cat!) with Treats and Praise

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(For complete guidance on this technique, see “Nothing in Life Is Free: A Training Technique for Dogs.”) You may need to seek professional help if, after two or three weeks of working on a command, your dog does not obey each time you ask.

- Don’t feed your dog food from the table and don’t allow begging.
- Don’t play “tug-of-war,” wrestle, or play roughly with your dog.
- Ignore barking and jumping up.
- Don’t allow your dog on the furniture or your bed unless invited to do so by you, because this is a privilege reserved for leaders. If your dog growls or snaps when you try to remove him from the furniture, use a treat to lure him off. Otherwise, try to limit his access to your bed or furniture by using baby gates or a crate or by closing doors.
- Always remember to reward appropriate behavior.
- Consult your veterinarian about acupuncture, massage therapy, or drug therapy. Your veterinarian may prescribe the temporary use of medication to be used in conjunction with behavior modification.
- Consider enrolling your dog in a training class. This may help establish a relationship between you and your dog in which you give commands and he obeys them. Be sure to choose a trainer who uses positive reinforcement methods. Understand that obedience classes alone won’t necessarily prevent or reduce dominance aggression.

### A Note about Children and Dogs

From your dog’s point of view, children, too, have a place in the dominance hierarchy. Because children are smaller and get down on the dog’s level to play, dogs often consider them to be playmates rather than superiors. Small children and dogs should never be left alone together without adult supervision. Older children should be taught how to play and interact appropriately and safely with dogs. Under no circumstances, however, should a child be left alone with a dog who has displayed signs of aggression.

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BEHAVIOR  
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# Unusual Eating Habits in Dogs and Cats

**IF YOUR PET HAS AN APPETITE FOR** such oddities as socks, rocks, or even feces, chances are you've wondered—and worried—about her unusual eating habits. In this case, your worry may be justified: Not only can your possessions be destroyed or damaged, but objects such as clothing and rocks can produce life-threatening blockages in your pet's intestines.

Eating non-food items has a name: It's called pica. A specific type of pica is stool eating—either the dog's own or that of another animal. It's called coprophagy. Rarely seen in cats, coprophagy is fairly common in dogs, especially those who tend to be highly food-motivated. And although it's not necessarily dangerous to the animal, it probably is unacceptable to you.

## Why Animals Do This

The causes of pica and coprophagy are not known. Many theories have been proposed by various experts, but none has been proven or disproven. One idea is that such behaviors may be attention-seeking behaviors. If engaging in one of these behaviors results in some type of social interaction between the animal and her owner—even a verbal scolding—then the behavior may be reinforced and occur more frequently.

Others think these behaviors may be attempts to obtain a necessary nutrient lacking in the diet, although no nutritional studies have ever substantiated this idea. Pica and coprophagy may also stem from frustration or anxiety. It's even possible that the behaviors begin as play; as the animal investigates and chews on the objects, she eventually begins to eat or ingest them.

Some experts have suggested that coprophagy is carried over from the normal parental behavior of ingesting the waste of young offspring. Others believe that coprophagy occurs more often in animals who live in relatively barren environments, are frequently confined to small areas, or receive limited attention from their owners. It's also possible that dogs learn this behavior from other dogs.

Because pica and coprophagy are not well understood, stopping these behaviors may require assistance from an animal-behavior professional who will work individually with you and your pet.

## Suggested Solutions for Coprophagy

Because the cause of coprophagy isn't known, no techniques or solutions are known to be consistently successful. However, the following techniques may be effective in resolving the problem.

- Treat your pet's food with something that causes her stool to taste bad. A commercial product called 4-BID™ is available through your veterinarian. The same result may be achieved by using the food additive MSG. Based on owners' reports, both of these products work in many cases, but not all. Before using either of these products, consult with your veterinarian.

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- Give your pet's stools a bad taste by sprinkling them directly with cayenne pepper or a commercial product such as Bitter Apple®. For this method to be effective, every stool your pet has access to must be treated so that she learns that eating stools results in something unpleasant. Otherwise, she may discriminate (using scent) which stools have been treated and which have not.
- Keep your dog on a leash any time you take her outside. If you see her about to ingest a stool, interrupt her by clapping your hands, spraying a squirt bottle, or shaking a can (only for pets who aren't afraid of loud noises). Then immediately give her a toy to play with instead, and praise her for taking an interest in the toy.
- Clean your yard daily to minimize your pet's opportunity to eat her stools.
- If your dog eats cat feces from the litter box, install a baby-gate in front of the litter box area. Your cat shouldn't have any trouble jumping over it, but your dog likely won't even make the attempt. Or place the litter box in a closet or room where the door can be wedged slightly open from both sides so that your cat has access but your dog doesn't. Think twice before setting up a booby trap to stop your dog from eating cat feces from a litter box: If it frightens your dog, it's likely to frighten your cat, too.
- Prevent your pet's access to these items.
- If your pet is highly food-oriented, change her diet to a low-calorie or high-fiber diet. This may allow her to eat more food, more often, which may decrease the behavior. Check with your veterinarian before changing your pet's diet.
- If you suspect that anxiety or frustration is the reason for your animal's pica habit, change the behavior by using behavior modification techniques.
- If you catch your pet ingesting items and believe it is to get attention, startle your pet with a loud noise or a spray of water. If possible, avoid letting her know that the startling noise or spray comes from you, and be sure to praise her when she leaves the items alone. You may want to give her something acceptable to eat or chew. Try to set aside 10–15 minutes twice a day to spend with your pet so that she doesn't need to resort to pica to get your attention.
- If you think your pet's pica habit is play behavior, then keep plenty of toys around for her to play with. Cats especially like to play with string, rubber bands, and tinsel, and ultimately ingest them. Keep these items out of reach and provide a selection of appropriate toys. (See "Cat Toys and How to Use Them" and "Dog Toys and How to Use Them.")

### Suggested Solutions for Pica

Pica can be a serious problem because items such as rubber bands, socks, rocks, and string can severely damage or block an animal's intestines. In some instances, the items must be surgically removed. Because pica can be potentially life-threatening, consult both your veterinarian and an animal-behavior professional for help. Here are some other suggestions.

- Make the objects your pet is eating taste unpleasant by applying cayenne pepper, Bitter Apple®, or some other aversive. (For more information on using aversives, see "Using Aversives to Modify Your Cat's Behavior" and "Using Aversives to Modify Your Dog's Behavior.")

### Related topics at [www.petsforlife.org](http://www.petsforlife.org)

- Cat Toys and How to Use Them
- Dog Toys and How to Use Them
- Using Aversives to Modify Your Cat's Behavior
- Using Aversives to Modify Your Dog's Behavior

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### What Doesn't Work:

- Interactive punishment (punishment that comes directly from you, such as verbal scolding) is usually not effective because it may be interpreted by your pet as attention. What's more, many animals learn to refrain from the problem behavior when their owner is present, yet still engage in the behavior when their owner is absent.
- Punishment after the fact is *never* helpful. Animals don't understand that they're being punished for something they did hours or even minutes before. This approach won't resolve the problem and is likely to produce either fearful or aggressive responses from your pet.

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# The Canine Escape Artist

## BEHAVIOR SERIES

**D**OES YOUR DOG'S ability to escape from the back yard have you convinced that he's nothing less than a "Hairy Houdini"? Your never-ending attempts to keep your pet confined to your yard may seem comical at times, but every escape opens up the possibility of tragic consequences. If your dog is running loose, he's in danger of being hit by a car, injured in a fight with another dog, or hurt in any number of other ways. You're also liable for any damage or injury your dog may cause, and you may be required to pay a fine if he's picked up by an animal control agency. To prevent escapes, you'll need to find out how your dog is getting out of the yard and, more importantly, why he's so determined to get out.

## Why Dogs Escape

### Social Isolation/Frustration

Your dog may be escaping because he's bored and lonely, especially if:

- He is left alone for long periods of time without opportunities for interaction with you.
- His environment is relatively barren, without playmates or toys.
- He is a puppy or adolescent (under three years old) and doesn't have other outlets for his energy.
- He is a particularly active type of dog (like the herding or sporting breeds) who needs an active "job" in order to be happy.
- He visits places after each escape that provide him with interaction and fun things to do. For example, he may go play with a neighbor's dog or visit the local school yard to play with the children.

### Recommendations

We recommend expanding your dog's world and increasing his "people time" in the following ways:

- Walk your dog daily. It's good exercise, both mentally and physically (for both of you).
- Teach your dog to fetch a ball or Frisbee® and practice with him as often as possible.
- Teach your dog a few commands or tricks. Try to hold a lesson every day for five to 10 minutes.
- Take an obedience class with your dog and practice what you've learned every day.

- Provide interesting toys (Kong®-type toys filled with treats or "busy-box" toys) to keep your dog busy when you're not home.
- Rotate your dog's toys to make them seem new and interesting.
- Keep your dog inside when you're unable to supervise him. (This will also keep him safe and prevent any possibility of his being stolen from your yard.)
- If you must be away from home for extended periods of time, take your dog to work with you or to a "doggie day care center," or ask a friend or neighbor to walk your dog.

### Sexual Roaming

Dogs become sexually mature at around six months of age. Like a teenager first feeling the surge of hormones, an intact male dog has a strong, natural drive to seek out females. As you can imagine, it can be difficult to prevent an intact dog from escaping when his motivation to do so is very high.

### Recommendations

Have your male dog neutered. Studies show that neutering will decrease sexual roaming in about 90 percent of cases. If an intact male has established a pattern of escaping, he may continue to do so even after he's neutered, which is even more reason to have him neutered as soon as possible.

Have your female dog spayed. If your intact female dog escapes your yard while she's in heat, she'll probably get pregnant (and she could be impregnated even if she stays

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in your yard). Millions of unwanted pets are euthanized every year. Please don't contribute to the pet overpopulation problem by allowing your female dog to breed indiscriminately.

## Fears and Phobias

Your dog may be escaping out of fear, especially if he's exposed to loud noises, such as thunderstorms, firecrackers, or construction sounds.

### Recommendations

Identify what is frightening your dog and desensitize him to it. You may need to seek out the help of a professional trainer, or talk to your veterinarian about anti-anxiety medications that might help your dog while you work on behavior modification.

Keep your dog indoors if there's any chance he may encounter the fear stimulus outside. You can even mute outside noises by creating a comfortable spot in a basement or windowless bathroom and turning on a television, radio, or loud fan.

Provide a "safe place" for your dog. Observe where he likes to go when he feels anxious, then allow access to that space, or create a similar space for him to use when the fear stimulus is present.

## Separation Anxiety

Your dog may be trying to escape due to "separation anxiety" if:

- He escapes as soon as, or shortly after, you leave.
- He displays other behaviors that reflect a strong attachment to you, such as following you around, greeting you wildly, or reacting anxiously to your preparations to leave.
- He remains near your home after he's escaped.

### Factors That Can Precipitate a Separation-Anxiety Problem

- Your family's schedule has changed, and that has resulted in your dog being left alone more often.
- Your family has recently moved to a new house.
- Your family has experienced the death or loss of a family member or another family pet.
- Your dog has recently spent time at an animal shelter or boarding kennel.

### Recommendations

Assuming your dog has been correctly diagnosed as suffering from separation anxiety, the problem can be resolved using counterconditioning and desensitization techniques.

## How Dogs Escape

Some dogs jump fences, but most actually climb them, using some part of the fence to push off from. A dog may also dig

under the fence, chew through the fence, learn to open a gate, or use any combination of these methods to get out of the yard. Knowing how your dog gets out will help you to modify your yard. But until you know why your dog wants to escape and you can decrease his motivation for doing so, the recommendations below won't be nearly as effective.

### Recommendations for Preventing Escape

**For climbing/jumping dogs:** Add an extension to your fence. It's not so important that the extension make the fence much higher, as long as it tilts inward at about a 45-degree angle. Be certain there are no structures placed near the fence, such as a table or chair or dog house, that your dog could use as a springboard to jump over the fence.

**For digging dogs:** Bury chicken wire at the base of your fence (with the sharp edges rolled inward), place large rocks at the base, or lay chain-link fencing on the ground.

Never chain or otherwise tether your dog to a stationary object as a means of keeping him confined. Tethering is not only cruel, but it also leads to aggressive behavior in dogs.

## Using Correction

Never correct your dog after he's already left the yard. Dogs associate punishment with what they're doing at the time they're punished. Punishing your dog after the fact won't eliminate the escaping behavior, but will probably make him afraid to come to you.

Never correct your dog if the escaping is related to fear or is due to separation anxiety. Punishing a fearful response will only make your dog more afraid and make the problem worse. In addition, avoid inadvertently reinforcing a fearful behavior—such as by petting a frightened dog and saying, "It's okay."

Only correct your dog if you can administer correction at the moment your dog is escaping and only if he doesn't associate the correction with you. If you can squirt him with a hose or make a loud noise as he is going over, under, or through the fence, it might be unpleasant enough that he won't want to do it again. If he realizes that you made the noise or squirted the water, however, he'll simply refrain from escaping when you're around. This type of correction is difficult to administer effectively and won't resolve the problem if used by itself.

You must also give your dog less reason to escape and make it more difficult for him to do so. Ultimately, that is how you'll put a permanent stop to that "Hairy Houdini" act.

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BEHAVIOR  
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# Helping Your Dog Overcome Fear of Thunder and Other Startling Noises

**W**HILE A GOOD “KRAACK” OR “BOOM” may have been good while Batman was taking down the Joker, such startling sounds are no joke for your dog. Firecrackers, thunder, and other loud, unexpected sounds often leave dogs frightened and wanting to flee to a safer place. These types of fears may develop even though your dog has had no traumatic experiences associated with the sound. The good news is that many fear-related problems can be successfully resolved. If left untreated, however, your dog’s fearful behavior will probably get worse.

The most common behavior problems associated with fear of loud noises are destruction and escaping. When your dog becomes frightened, she tries to reduce her fear. She may try to escape to a place where the sounds of thunder or firecrackers are less intense. If she feels less afraid by leaving the yard or going into a certain room or area of the house, then the escape or destructive behavior is reinforced because it successfully lessens her fear. For some dogs, just the activity or physical exertion associated with one of these behaviors may be an outlet for their anxiety. Unfortunately, escape or destructive behavior can be a problem for you and could also result in physical injury to your dog.

Your dog may also begin to associate a particular startling noise with other things in her environment, and she may grow afraid of these other things because she associates them with the loud noise that frightens her. For example, dogs who are afraid of thunder may later become afraid of the wind, dark clouds, and flashes of light that often precede the sound of thunder. Dogs who do not like the sound of firecrackers may become fearful of the children who have the firecrackers or may become afraid to go in the backyard, if that’s where they usually hear the noise.

## What You Can Do to Help

### Create a Safe Place

Try to create a safe place for your dog to go to when she hears the noises that frighten her. But remember, this must be a safe location from her perspective, not yours. Notice where she goes, or tries to go, when she’s frightened, and if at all possible, give her access to that place. If she’s trying to get inside the house, consider installing a dog door. If she’s trying to get under your bed, give her access to your bedroom.

You can also create a “hidey-hole” that is dark, small, and shielded from the frightening sound as much as possible. Encourage her to go there when you’re home and the thunder or other noise occurs. Consider using a fan or radio near the spot to help block out the sound. Feed her in that location and help your dog associate that spot with other “good things” happening to her there. She must be able to come and go from this location freely. Confining her in the “hidey-hole” when she doesn’t want to be there will only cause more problems.

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The “safe place” approach may work with some dogs, but not all. Some dogs are motivated to move and be active when frightened and “hiding out” won’t help them feel less fearful.

## Distract Your Dog

This method works best when your dog is just beginning to get anxious. Encourage her to engage in any activity that captures her attention and distracts her from behaving fearfully. Start when she first alerts you to the noise and is not yet showing a lot of fearful behavior, but is only watchful. Immediately try to interest her in doing something that she enjoys. Get out the tennis ball and play fetch (in an escape-proof area), or practice some commands that she knows. Reward her with praise and treats for paying attention to the game or the commands.

As the storm or other noise builds, you may not be able to keep her attention on the activity, but it might delay the start of the fearful behavior for longer periods each time you do it. If you can’t keep her attention and she begins acting fearfully, stop the process. If you continue, you may inadvertently reinforce her fearful behavior.

## Behavior Modification

Behavior modification techniques are often successful in reducing fears and phobias. The appropriate techniques are called “counterconditioning” and “desensitization.” These techniques condition or teach your dog to respond in nonfearful ways to sounds and other stimuli that have previously frightened her.

These techniques must be implemented very gradually. Begin by exposing your dog to an intensity level of noise that doesn’t frighten her and pairing the noise with something pleasant, like a treat or a fun game. Gradually increase the volume as you continue to offer her something pleasant. Through this process, she’ll come to associate “good things” with the previously feared sound.

### *Here's an Example of How to Do This*

- Make a tape with firecracker noises on it.
- Play the tape at such a low volume that your dog doesn’t respond fearfully. While the tape is playing, feed her dinner, give her a treat, or play her favorite game.
- In your next session, play the tape a little louder while you feed her or play her favorite game.
- Continue increasing the volume through many sessions over a period of several weeks or months. If she displays fearful behavior at any time while the tape is playing, STOP. Begin your next session at a lower volume, one that doesn’t produce anxiety, and proceed more slowly.

If these techniques aren’t used correctly, they won’t be successful and can even make the problem worse.

For some fears, it can be difficult to re-create the fear stimulus. For example, thunder is accompanied by lightning, rain, and changes in barometric pressure; your dog’s fearful response may be to the combination of these things and not just the thunder. You may need professional assistance to create and implement this kind of behavior modification program.

## Consult Your Veterinarian

Medication may help reduce your dog’s anxiety levels for short time periods. Your veterinarian is the only person who is qualified and licensed to prescribe medication for your dog. Don’t attempt to give your dog any over-the-counter or prescription medication without consulting your veterinarian. Animals don’t respond to drugs the same way people do, and a medication that may be safe for humans could be fatal to your dog. Drug therapy alone won’t reduce fears and phobias permanently, but in extreme cases, behavior modification and medication used together might be the best approach.

## What Not to Do

- Do not attempt to reassure your dog when she is afraid. This may only reinforce her fearful behavior. If you pet, soothe, or give her treats when she’s behaving fearfully, she may interpret this as a reward for her fearful behavior. Instead, try to behave normally, as if you don’t notice her fearfulness.
- Do not put your dog in a crate to prevent her from being destructive during a thunderstorm. She’ll still be fearful when she’s in the crate and is likely to injure herself, perhaps even severely, while attempting to get out of the crate.
- Do not punish your dog for being afraid. Punishment will only make her more fearful.
- Do not try to force your dog to experience or be close to the sound that frightens her. For example, making her stay close to a group of children who are lighting firecrackers will only make her more afraid and could cause her to become aggressive in an attempt to escape from the situation.

These approaches will fail because they won’t decrease your dog’s fear. Merely trying to prevent her from escaping or being destructive won’t work, either. If your dog is still afraid, she’ll continue to show that fear in whatever way she can—whether by digging, jumping, climbing, chewing, barking, or howling. Finally, know that formal training won’t make your dog less afraid of thunder or other noises, although it could help boost her general confidence.

## Animal-Behavior Specialist

If your dog has severe fears and phobias and you’re unable to achieve success with the techniques outlined here, you should consult with an animal-behavior specialist and your veterinarian.

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# Calming the Fearful Dog

## BEHAVIOR SERIES

**F**EAR COMES IN ALL SHAPES AND SIZES, especially for your furry, four-pawed friend. Whether in response to a stranger or startling noise, your dog may display certain body postures, including lowering his head, flattening his ears back against his head, and tucking his tail between his legs if he's scared.

A frightened dog may also pant, salivate, tremble, pace, or try to escape. He may show submissive behaviors—avoiding eye contact, urinating submissively, or rolling over to expose his belly—or he may freeze and remain immobile. Some dogs will bark or growl at the feared object. In extreme cases of fearfulness, a dog may be destructive (out of general anxiety or in an attempt to escape), or he may lose control of his bladder or bowels.

### Causes of Fearful Behavior

Determining why your dog is fearful is helpful but not always essential to treating the fearful behavior, although the reason for his fear will dictate the relative success of the treatment. A dog who is genetically predisposed to general fearfulness, or a dog who was improperly socialized during a critical stage in his development, will probably not respond as well to treatment as a dog who has developed a fear in response to a specific experience. It's essential, however, to first rule out any medical causes for your dog's fearful behavior. Your first step should be to take your dog to your veterinarian for a thorough medical evaluation.

### What You Can Do

Most fears won't go away by themselves and, if left untreated, may get worse. Some fears, when treated, will decrease in intensity or frequency but may not disappear entirely. After you've ruled out medical causes, your first

step in dealing with your dog's fearful behavior is to identify what triggers his fear. Is he afraid of startling noises? Is he afraid of being left alone? If your dog's fears are rooted in either of these scenarios, see our related tip sheets on these topics. Most fears can be treated using desensitization and counterconditioning techniques, which require time and patience. You may need help from a professional animal-behavior specialist with these techniques.

### How to Use the Desensitization Technique

- Begin by exposing your dog to a very low level or small amount of whatever is causing his fear. For example, if he is afraid of bicycles, start with a bicycle placed at a distance of 100 feet from your dog.
- Reward him for calm, nonfearful behavior in the presence of the bicycle. Gradually move the bicycle closer to him. As long as your dog remains relaxed, reward him with treats and praise. If at any point he becomes anxious, move the bicycle further away and proceed at a slower pace.
- When your dog can remain relaxed in the presence of a stationary bicycle, move the bicycle 100 feet away again, but have someone ride it slowly by him. Again, gradually increase the proximity of the slowly moving bicycle, rewarding your dog for remaining calm and relaxed. Repeat this procedure as many times as

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necessary, gradually increasing the speed of the moving bicycle.

- This process may take several days, weeks, or even months. You must proceed at a slow enough pace that your dog never becomes fearful during the desensitization process. If you move too quickly, you won't be successful.

## How to Use the Counterconditioning Technique

Counterconditioning works best when used in conjunction with desensitization and involves pairing the fear *stimulus* (for example, a moving bicycle) with an activity or behavior incompatible with the fear *behavior* (for example, the dog remaining in the "sit" position).

- Using the desensitization technique example described previously, while your dog is exposed to the bicycle, ask him to perform some obedience exercises, such as "sit" and "down." Reward him for obeying and continue to have him obey commands as the bicycle is moved closer to him.
- If your dog doesn't know any commands, teach him a few using treats and praise. Don't ever use punishment, collar corrections, or scolding to teach him the commands, as the point of counterconditioning is for him to associate pleasant things with the stimulus that now frightens him.

## Realistic Expectations

Some of the things that frighten dogs can be difficult to reproduce or control. For example, if your dog is afraid of thunderstorms, he may be responding to other things that occur during the storm, such as smells, barometric pressure changes, or changes in natural light. During the desensitization process, it is impossible for you to reproduce all of these factors. Another example would be if your dog is afraid of men. You may work at desensitizing him, but if a man lives in your household and your dog is constantly exposed to him, this can disrupt the gradual process of desensitization. You need to be patient with your dog and work hard not to become frustrated during the desensitization process.

## Related topics at [www.petsforlife.org](http://www.petsforlife.org)

- Helping Your Dog Overcome Fear of Thunder and Other Startling Noises
- Reducing Separation Anxiety in Dogs
- Understanding Aggressive Behavior in Dogs

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## When to Get Help

Because desensitization and counterconditioning can be difficult techniques to master, and because behavior problems may increase if these techniques are done incorrectly, you may want to get professional, in-home help from an animal-behavior specialist. Keep in mind that a fearful dog who feels trapped or is pushed too far may become aggressive. Some dogs will respond aggressively to whatever it is that frightens them. If your dog displays any aggressive behavior, such as growling, snarling, snapping, or baring his teeth, stop all behavior modification procedures and seek professional help from an animal-behavior specialist as soon as possible.

## Consult with Your Veterinarian

Medication may help reduce your dog's anxiety levels for short time periods. Your veterinarian is the only person who is qualified and licensed to prescribe medication for your dog. Don't attempt to give your dog any over-the-counter or prescription medication without consulting with your veterinarian. Animals don't respond to drugs the same way people do, and a medication that may be safe for humans could be fatal to your dog. Drug therapy alone won't reduce fears and phobias permanently, but in extreme cases, behavior modification and medication used together may be the best approach.

## What Not to Do

- Do not punish your dog for being afraid. Punishment will only make him more fearful.
- Do not try to force your dog to experience the object or situation that is causing him to be afraid. For example, if he is afraid of bicycles and you force him to stand in place while bicycles whiz by, he'll probably become more fearful of bicycles rather than less fearful.
- Never punish your dog after the fact for destruction or house soiling caused by anxiety or fear. Animals don't understand punishment after the fact, even if it's only seconds later. This kind of destruction or house soiling is the result of panic, not misbehavior. Punishment will do more harm than good.

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BEHAVIOR  
SERIES

# Housetraining Your Puppy

**C**ONTRARY TO popular belief, housetraining a puppy requires far more than a few stacks of old newspapers—it calls for vigilance, patience, and plenty of commitment. By following the procedures outlined below, you can minimize house soiling incidents, but virtually every puppy will have an accident in the house, and more likely, several. Expect this—it's part of raising a puppy. The more consistent you are in following the basic housetraining procedures, however, the faster your puppy will learn acceptable behavior. It may take several weeks to housetrain your puppy, and with some of the smaller breeds, it might take longer.

## Establish a Routine

Like babies, puppies do best on a regular schedule. Take your puppy outside frequently—at least every two hours—and immediately after he wakes up from a nap, after playing, and after eating or drinking.

Praise your puppy lavishly every time he eliminates outdoors—you can even give him a treat—but remember to do so immediately after he's finished eliminating, not after he comes back inside the house. This step is vital, because rewarding your dog for eliminating outdoors is the only way he'll know what's expected of him.

Pick a bathroom spot near the door, and always take your puppy to that spot using a leash. Take him out for a longer walk or some playtime only after he has eliminated. If you clean up an accident in the house, take the soiled rags or paper towels and leave them in the bathroom spot. The smell will help your puppy recognize the area as the place he is supposed to eliminate. While your puppy is eliminating, use a word or phrase like “go potty” that you can eventually use before he eliminates to remind him what to do.

Put your puppy on a regular feeding schedule and feed him a high-quality diet to make housetraining easier.

Depending on their age, puppies usually need to be fed three or four times a day. Feeding your puppy at the same times each day will make it more likely that he'll eliminate at consistent times as well, and that makes housetraining easier for both of you.

## Keep Your Eyes Peeled

Don't give your puppy an opportunity to soil in the house; keep an eye on him whenever he's indoors. You can tether him to you with a six-foot leash, or use baby gates to keep him in the room where you are. Watch for signs that he needs to eliminate, like sniffing around or circling. When you see these signs, immediately grab the leash and take him outside to his bathroom spot. If he eliminates, praise him lavishly and reward him with a treat.

## Confinement

When you're unable to watch your puppy at all times, he should be confined to an area small enough that he won't want to eliminate there. The space should be just big enough for him to comfortably stand, lie down, and turn around in. You can use a portion of a bathroom or laundry room blocked off with baby gates. Or you may want to crate train your puppy and use the crate to confine him. (Be sure to learn how to use a crate

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humanely as a method of confinement.) If your puppy has spent several hours in confinement, you'll need to take him directly to his bathroom spot as soon as you let him out, and praise him when he eliminates.

## Oops!

Expect your puppy to have a few accidents in the house—it's a normal part of housetraining. Here's what to do when that happens:

- When you catch him in the act of eliminating in the house, do something to interrupt him, like make a startling noise (be careful not to scare him). Immediately take him to his bathroom spot, praise him, and give him a treat if he finishes eliminating there.
- Don't punish your puppy for eliminating in the house. If you find a soiled area, it's too late to administer a correction. Just clean it up. Rubbing your puppy's nose in it, taking him to the spot and scolding him, or any other punishment will only make him afraid of you or afraid to eliminate in your presence. In fact, punishment will often do more harm than good.
- Cleaning the soiled area is very important because puppies are highly motivated to continue soiling in areas that smell like urine or feces.

It's extremely important that you use the supervision and confinement procedures outlined above to prevent the number of accidents. If you allow your puppy to eliminate frequently in the house, he'll get confused about where he's supposed to eliminate, which will prolong the housetraining process.

## Paper Training

A puppy under six months of age cannot be expected to control his bladder for more than a few hours at a time. If you have to be away from home more than four or five hours a day, this may not be the best time for you to get a puppy; instead, you may want to consider an older dog, who can wait for your return.

But if you're already committed to having a puppy and must be away for long periods of time, you'll need to make arrangements for someone, such as a responsible neighbor or a professional pet sitter, to take him outside to eliminate.

## Related topics at [www.petsforlife.org](http://www.petsforlife.org)

- [Crate Training Your Dog](#)

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Or you'll need to train him to eliminate in a specific place indoors. Be aware, however, that doing so can prolong the process of housetraining. Teaching your puppy to eliminate on newspaper may create a lifelong surface preference, meaning that even as an adult he may eliminate on any newspaper lying around the living room.

When your puppy must be left alone for long periods of time, confine him to an area with enough room for a sleeping space, a playing space, and a separate place to eliminate. In the area designated as the elimination area, use either newspapers or a sod box. To make a sod box, place sod in a container such as a child's small plastic swimming pool. You can also find dog litter products at a pet supply store. If you clean up an accident in the house, put the soiled rags or paper towels in the designated elimination area. The smell will help your puppy recognize the area as the place where he is supposed to eliminate.

## Other Types of House Soiling Problems

If you've consistently followed the housetraining procedures and your puppy continues to eliminate in the house, there may be another reason for his behavior.

- **Medical Problems:** House soiling can often be caused by physical problems such as a urinary tract infection or a parasite infection. Check with your veterinarian to rule out any possibility of disease or illness.
- **Submissive/Excitement Urination:** Some dogs, especially young ones, temporarily lose control of their bladders when they become excited or feel threatened. This usually occurs during greetings or periods of intense play or when they're about to be punished.
- **Territorial Urine-Marking:** Dogs sometimes deposit small amounts of urine or feces to scent-mark their territory. Both male and female dogs do this, and it most often occurs when they believe their territory has been invaded.
- **Separation Anxiety:** Dogs who become anxious when they're left alone may house soil as a result. Usually, there are other symptoms as well, such as destructive behavior or vocalization.
- **Fears or Phobias:** When animals become frightened, they may lose control of their bladder or bowels. If your puppy is afraid of loud noises such as thunderstorms or fireworks, he may house soil when he's exposed to these sounds.

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BEHAVIOR  
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# How to Use a Head Halter

**“W**HOA, ROVER, WHOA!” Sound familiar? If that’s what it’s like when you take your dog for a walk, you may want to consider getting a head halter.

A head halter is a special kind of collar designed for dogs who like to pull their people when they walk. It consists of a strap that goes around your dog’s nose and another strap that goes around his neck, just behind his ears. The leash fastens to the halter under the dog’s chin to a ring that’s also attached to the nose strap. When your dog begins to pull, the design of the head halter causes his nose to be turned down and back toward you, which makes it physically difficult for him to continue pulling.

The head halter is a humane method of restraint because it doesn’t cause any pain. It works much better to stop a dog from pulling than a choke chain or prong collar. Some brand names of head halters include “Gentle Leader,” “Promise Collar,” and “Halti.”

## How Should It Fit?

The head halter must be fitted properly to be effective and comfortable for your dog. The neck strap should be as high up on your dog’s neck as you can get it, just behind his ears. The strap should be just tight enough for you to fit one finger between it and your dog’s neck. The

nosepiece should be adjusted so that when your dog’s mouth is closed, the nosepiece can slide down to where the skin begins on his nose—but not so loose that it can slide off the end of his nose. The nosepiece will sit naturally, just below your dog’s eyes. Make sure that the metal ring to which the leash attaches is underneath his chin.

## How Will Your Dog React?

Most dogs will resist a head halter at first. The amount of resistance varies for each dog. When you first put the head halter on, your dog may try to get it off by pawing at his nose or rubbing his nose on the ground, on you, or on anything he can get close to. The best strategy is to keep his head up and keep him moving by using positive verbal reinforcement and treats. Most dogs eventually accept head halters. When your dog associates the halter with going for a walk, he’ll begin to react positively to it, and soon both you and your dog will enjoy taking walks together!

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## Things to Remember

- Make sure the head halter is fitted properly.
- Fit the halter so that it is snug around your dog's neck and high behind his ears, but loose enough around his nose so that the nose strap can slide easily down to the fleshy part of his nose.
- Don't confuse the head halter with a muzzle.
- Keep in mind that a dog wearing a head halter can still eat, drink, pant, bark, and bite, if he chooses.
- Never use a hard jerk with the head halter.
- Never use the head halter with a retractable lead.
- Be sure your dog doesn't run quickly to the end of the lead; if he does, he may give himself a hard jerk.

- Outfit your dog with the head halter only during on-leash walks with you or when you're directly supervising him.
- Don't allow your dog to wear the head halter around the house; he'll have plenty of time to work at getting it off and will eventually succeed.
- Read the information sheet that comes with your head halter.

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## Related topics at [www.petsforlife.org](http://www.petsforlife.org)

- Positive Reinforcement: Training Your Dog (or Cat!) with Treats and Praise

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BEHAVIOR  
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# Introducing Your New Dog to Your Resident Dog

**F**ROM “THE LEADER OF THE PACK” to “the top dog,” plenty of simplistic metaphors come from the canine world. But relationships between canines can be pretty complex, beginning with the very first meeting. Like most animals who live in groups, dogs establish their own social structure, sometimes called a dominance hierarchy. This dominance hierarchy serves to maintain order, reduce conflict, and promote cooperation among pack members. Dogs also establish territories, which they may defend against intruders or rivals. Obviously, dogs’ social and territorial nature affects their behavior whenever a new dog is introduced to the household.

## Introduction Techniques

### Choose a Neutral Location

Introduce the dogs in a neutral location so that your resident dog is less likely to view the newcomer as a territorial intruder. Each dog should be handled by a separate person. With both dogs on leashes, begin the introductions in an area unfamiliar to each, such as a park or a neighbor’s yard. If you frequently walk your resident dog in a nearby park, she may view that area as her territory, too, so choose a less familiar site. If you are adopting your dog from an animal shelter, you might even bring your resident dog to the local shelter and introduce the two there.

### Use Positive Reinforcement

From the first meeting, help both dogs experience “good things” when they’re in each other’s presence. Let them sniff each other briefly, which is normal canine greeting behavior. As they do, talk to them in a happy, friendly tone of voice; never use a threatening tone. (Don’t allow them to investigate and sniff each other for too long, however, as this may escalate to an aggressive response.) After a

short time, get the attention of both dogs and give each a treat in return for obeying a simple command, such as “sit” or “stay.” Take the dogs for a walk and let them sniff and investigate each other at intervals. Continue with the “happy talk,” food rewards, and simple commands.

### Be Aware of Body Postures

One body posture that indicates things are going well is a “play-bow.” One dog will crouch with her front legs on the ground and her hind end in the air. This is an invitation to play, and a posture that usually elicits friendly behavior from the other dog. Watch carefully for body postures that indicate an aggressive response, including hair standing up on one dog’s back, teeth baring, deep growls, a stiff-legged gait, or a prolonged stare. If you see such postures, interrupt the interaction immediately by calmly getting each dog interested in something else. For example, both handlers can call their dogs to them, have them sit or lie down, and reward each with a treat. The dogs’ interest in the treats should prevent the situation from escalating into aggression. Try letting the dogs interact again, but this time for a shorter time period and/or at a greater distance from each other.

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## Take the Dogs Home

When the dogs seem to be tolerating each other's presence without fearful or aggressive responses and the investigative greeting behaviors have tapered off, you can take them home. Whether you choose to take them in the same vehicle will depend on their size, how well they ride in the car, how trouble-free the initial introduction has been, and how many dogs are involved.

## Space Your Introductions

If you have more than one resident dog in your household, it may be best to introduce the resident dogs to the new dog one at a time. Two or more resident dogs may have a tendency to gang up on the newcomer.

## Support the Top Dog

It is important to support the dominant dog in your household, even if that turns out to be the newcomer. This may mean, for example, allowing the dominant dog to claim a favored sleeping spot as his or to have access to a desirable toy. Trying to impose your preference for which dog should be dominant can confuse the dogs and create further problems.

## Introducing Puppies to Adult Dogs

Puppies usually pester adult dogs unmercifully. Before the age of four months, puppies may not recognize subtle body postures from adult dogs signaling that they've had enough. Well-socialized adult dogs with good temperaments may set limits with puppies with a warning growl or snarl. These behaviors are normal and should be allowed. Adult dogs who aren't well socialized, or who have a history of fighting with other dogs, may attempt to set limits with more aggressive behaviors, such as biting, which could harm the puppy. For this reason, a puppy shouldn't be left alone with an adult dog until you're confident the puppy isn't in any danger. Be sure to give the adult dog some quiet time away from the puppy and some extra individual attention as well.

## When to Get Help

If the introductions don't go smoothly, contact a professional animal behaviorist immediately. Dogs can be severely injured in fights, and the longer the problem continues, the harder it can be to resolve. Punishment won't work and could make things worse. Fortunately, most conflicts between dogs in the same family can be resolved with professional guidance.

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BEHAVIOR  
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# Positive Reinforcement

## Training Your Dog (or Cat!) with Treats and Praise

**W**E ALL LIKE TO BE PRAISED rather than punished. The same is true for your pet, and that's the theory behind positive reinforcement. Positive reinforcement means giving your pet something pleasant or rewarding immediately after she does something you want her to do. Because your praise or reward makes her more likely to repeat that behavior in the future, it is one of your most powerful tools for shaping or changing your pet's behavior.

Correct timing is essential when using positive reinforcement. The reward must occur immediately—within seconds—or your pet may not associate it with the proper action. For example, if you have your dog “sit” but reward her after she’s already stood back up, she’ll think she’s being rewarded for standing up.

Consistency is also essential. Everyone in the family should use the same commands. It might help to post these where everyone can become familiar with them. The most commonly used commands for dogs are:

- “Sit”
- “Stay”
- “Down” (which means “lie down”)
- “Off” (which means “get off of me” or “get off the furniture”)
- “Stand”
- “Come”
- “Heel” (or “let’s go” or “with me”)
- “Leave it”
- “Settle”
- “Watch me”

Consistency means always rewarding the desired behavior and never rewarding undesired behavior.

### Using Positive Reinforcement

For your pet, positive reinforcement may include food treats, praise, petting, or a favorite toy or game. Food treats work especially well for training your dog. A treat should be enticing and irresistible to your pet. It should be a very small, soft piece of food, so that she will immediately gulp it down and look to you for more. If you give her something she has to chew or that breaks into bits and falls on the floor, she’ll be looking around the floor, not at you. Small pieces of soft commercial treats, hot dogs, cheese, or cooked chicken or beef have all proven successful. Experiment to see what works best for your pet. You can carry the treats in a pocket or fanny pack. Each time you use a food reward, you should couple it with a verbal reward (praise). Say something like, “Good dog,” in a positive, happy tone of voice.

Some pets may not be interested in food treats. For those pets, the reward could be in the form of a toy or brief play.

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When your pet is learning a new behavior, she should be rewarded every time she does the behavior, which means continuous reinforcement. It may be necessary to use a technique called “shaping” with your pet, which means reinforcing something close to the desired response and then gradually requiring more from your dog before she gets the treat. For example, if you’re teaching your dog to “shake hands,” you may initially reward her for lifting her paw off the ground, then for lifting it higher, then for touching your hand, then for letting you hold her paw, and finally, for actually “shaking hands” with you.

Intermittent reinforcement can be used once your pet has reliably learned the behavior. At first, reward her with the treat three out of every four times she does the behavior. Then, over time, reward her about half the time, then about a third of the time, and so on, until you’re only rewarding her occasionally with the treat. Continue to praise her every time—although once your dog has learned the behavior, your praise can be less effusive, such as a quiet, but positive, “Good dog.” Use a variable schedule of reinforcement so that she doesn’t catch on that she only has to respond every other time. Your pet will soon learn that if she keeps responding, eventually she’ll get what she wants—your praise and an occasional treat.

By understanding reinforcement, you’ll see that you’re not forever bound to carry a pocketful of goodies. Your dog will soon be working for your verbal praise, because she really does want to please you and knows that, occasionally, she’ll get a treat, too. There are many small opportunities to reinforce her behavior. You may have her “sit” before letting her out the door (which helps prevent door-darting), before petting her (which helps prevent jumping up on people), or before feeding her. Give her a pat or a “Good dog” for lying quietly by your feet, or slip a treat into a Kong®-type toy when she’s chewing it instead of your shoe.

## The Pros and Cons of Punishment

Punishment can be verbal, postural, or physical, and it means giving your pet something unpleasant immediately after she does something you don’t want her to do. The punishment makes it less likely that the behavior will occur again. To be

effective, punishment must be delivered while your pet is engaged in the undesirable behavior—in other words, “caught in the act.” If the punishment is delivered too late, even seconds later, your pet will not associate the punishment with the undesired behavior.

Punishment delivered by you may erode your dog’s trust. That’s why punishment is most effective when it does not come directly from you. For example, after your dog acts in an undesirable way, use a shake can, an air horn, or keys—but don’t draw attention to the fact that the noise comes from you. If your dog perceives her “environment,” instead of you, to be delivering the punishment, she’ll be more likely to avoid the behavior even when you’re not around.

In addition, if you’re too late in administering it, punishment will seem unpredictable to your dog. She’s likely to become fearful, distrustful, or aggressive, which will only lead to more behavior problems. What we humans often interpret as “guilty” looks are actually submissive postures by our pets. Animals don’t have a moral sense of right and wrong, but they are adept at associating your presence, and the presence of a mess, with punishment.

If you’ve tried punishment and it hasn’t worked, you should stop using punishment and use only positive reinforcement. And never use physical punishment that involves some level of discomfort or pain, which may cause your pet to bite to defend herself. Holding the neck skin and shaking your dog or performing “alpha rolls” (forcing your dog onto her back and pinning her on the floor) are both likely to result in bites. And punishment might be associated with other stimuli, including people, that are present at the time the punishment occurs. For example, a pet who is punished for getting too close to a small child may become fearful of, or aggressive toward, that child—or toward other children. That’s why physical punishment is not only bad for your pet, it’s also bad for you and others.

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## Related topics at [www.petsforlife.org](http://www.petsforlife.org)

- Nothing in Life Is Free: A Training Technique for Dogs
- Positive Reinforcement—Training Your Cat

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# Understanding Your Puppy's Behavior and Development

**W**ELL-SOCIALIZED DOGS ARE MORE LIKELY to have well-socialized puppies. Pups often mirror their mothers' calm or fearful attitude toward people; this is a normal part of their socialization. But you can play a vital role, too, by petting, talking, and playing with puppy to help him develop good "people skills."

Puppies are usually weaned at six to seven weeks, but are still learning important skills as their mother gradually leaves them for longer periods of time. Ideally, puppies should stay with their littermates (or other "role-model" dogs) for at least 12 weeks.

Puppies separated from their littermates too early often fail to develop appropriate social skills, such as learning how to send and receive signals, what an "inhibited bite" (acceptable mouthing pressure) means, how far to go in play-wrestling, and so forth. Play is important for puppies because it increases their physical coordination, social skills, and learning limits. By interacting with their mother and littermates, puppies explore the ranking process (who's in charge) and also learn how to be a dog.

Skills not acquired during the first eight weeks may be lost forever. While these stages are important and fairly consistent, a dog's mind remains receptive to new experiences and lessons well beyond puppyhood. Most dogs are still puppies, in mind and body, through the first two years of life.

## Stages of Puppy Development:

### 0–2 Weeks: Neonatal Period

- Puppy is most influenced by his mother.
- Senses of touch and taste are present at birth.

### 2–4 Weeks: Transitional Period

- Puppy is most influenced by his mother and littermates.
- Eyes open, teeth begin to come in, and senses of hearing and smell develop.
- Puppy begins to stand, walk a little, wag tail, and bark.
- By the fourth or fifth week, eyesight is well-developed.

### 3–12 Weeks: Socialization Period

- During this period, puppy needs opportunities to meet other dogs and people.
- By three to five weeks, puppy becomes aware of his surroundings, companions (both canine and human), and relationships, including play.
- By four to six weeks, puppy is most influenced by littermates and is learning about being a dog.

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- From four to 12 weeks, puppy remains influenced by littermates and is also influenced by people. Puppy learns to play, develops social skills, learns the inhibited bite, explores social structure/ranking, and improves physical coordination.
- By five to seven weeks, puppy develops curiosity and explores new experiences. Puppy needs positive “people” experiences during this time.
- By seven to nine weeks, puppy is refining his physical skills and coordination, and can begin to be housetrained. Puppy has full use of senses.
- By eight to 10 weeks, puppy experiences real fear involving normal objects and experiences; puppy needs positive training during this time.
- By nine to 12 weeks, puppy is refining reactions, developing social skills with littermates (appropriate interactions), and exploring the environment and objects. Puppy begins to focus on people; this is a good time to begin formal training.

### **3–6 Months: Ranking Period**

- Puppy is most influenced by “playmates,” who may now include those of other species.
- Puppy begins to see and use ranking (dominance and submission) within the household (the puppy’s “pack”), including humans.
- Puppy begins teething (and associated chewing).
- At four months of age, puppy experiences another fear stage.

### **6–18 Months: Adolescence**

- Puppy is most influenced by human and dog “pack” members.
- At seven to nine months, puppy goes through a second chewing phase, part of exploring territory.
- Puppy increases exploration of dominance, including challenging humans.
- If not spayed or neutered, puppy experiences beginnings of sexual behavior. (Spaying or neutering your puppy at an early age will likely increase the health benefits of the surgery and increase his lifespan.)

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# Dealing with Normal Puppy Behavior

## Chewing

**W**HETHER YOU THOUGHT THAT RAISING A CHILD is the toughest thing to do may not have raised a puppy. After all, at least babies can wear diapers! Much like infants and toddlers, though, puppies explore their world by putting things in their mouths. Puppies are teething until they're about six months old, which usually creates some discomfort. Chewing not only facilitates teething, but also makes sore gums feel better.

Puppies may chew on furniture, shoes, shrubbery, and other objects. These are normal puppy behaviors, but they can still create problems for you. Unfortunately, unlike children, puppies won't magically "outgrow" these behaviors as they mature. Instead, you must shape your puppy's behaviors and teach him which ones are acceptable and which aren't.

### Discouraging Unacceptable Behaviors

It's virtually inevitable that your puppy will, at some point, chew up something you value. This is part of raising a puppy! You can, however, prevent most problems by taking the following precautions.

- Minimize chewing problems by puppy-proofing your house. Put the trash out of reach—inside a cabinet or outside on the porch—or buy containers with locking lids. Encourage children to pick up their toys and don't leave socks, shoes, eyeglasses, briefcases, or TV remote controls lying around within your puppy's reach.
- If, and only if, you catch your puppy chewing on something he shouldn't, interrupt the behavior with a loud noise, then offer him an acceptable chew toy instead. Praise him lavishly when he takes the toy in his mouth.
- Make unacceptable chew items unpleasant to your puppy. Furniture and other items can be coated with a taste deterrent (such as Bitter Apple®) to make them unappealing. (See "Using Aversives to Modify Your Dog's Behavior.")
- Don't give your puppy objects to play with—such as old socks, old shoes, or old children's toys—that closely resemble items that are off-limits. Puppies can't tell the difference.
- Closely supervise your puppy. Don't give him the chance to go off by himself and get into trouble. Use baby gates, close doors, or tether him to you with a six-foot leash so that you can keep an eye on him.
- When you must be gone from your home or you can't actively supervise your puppy, confine him to a small, safe area such as a laundry room. You might also consider crate training your puppy. (See "Crate Training Your Dog.") Puppies under six months of age shouldn't be crated for longer than three or four hours at a time because they may not be able to control their bladders and bowels longer than that.
- Make sure your puppy is getting adequate physical activity. Puppies (and dogs) left alone in a yard don't play by themselves. Take your puppy for walks or play a game of fetch with him for both mental and physical exercise.

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- Give your puppy plenty of “people time.” He can only learn the rules of your home when he’s with you.

### Encouraging Acceptable Behavior

- Provide your puppy with lots of appropriate toys. (See “Dog Toys and How to Use Them.”)
- Rotate your puppy’s toys. Puppies are often more interested in unfamiliar or novel objects. Put out a few for several days, then pick those up and put out different ones.
- Experiment with different kinds of toys. When you introduce a new toy to your puppy, watch him to make sure he won’t tear it up and ingest the pieces.
- Consider the various types of toys that can be stuffed with food. Putting tidbits of food inside chew toys focuses your puppy’s chewing activities on those toys instead of on unacceptable objects.
- If your puppy is teething, try freezing a wet washcloth for him to chew on.

### Other Reasons for Destructive Behavior

In most cases, destructive chewing by puppies is nothing more than normal puppy behavior. Occasionally, however, puppies—like adult dogs—can exhibit destructive behaviors for specific reasons. Examples include separation anxiety, fear-related behaviors, and attention-getting behaviors. For help with these problems, contact a professional animal behaviorist.

### Related topics at [www.petsforlife.org](http://www.petsforlife.org)

- Crate Training Your Dog
- Dog Toys and How to Use Them
- Using Aversives to Modify Your Dog’s Behavior

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### What Not to Do

Never discipline or punish your puppy after the fact. If you discover a chewed item even minutes after he’s chewed it, you’re too late. Animals associate correction with what they’re doing at the time they’re being corrected. A puppy can’t reason that, “I tore up those shoes an hour ago and that’s why I’m being scolded now.” Some people believe this is what a puppy is thinking because he runs and hides or because he “looks guilty.”

In reality, “guilty looks” are actually canine submissive postures that dogs show when they’re threatened. When you’re angry and upset, your puppy feels threatened by your tone of voice, body postures, and facial expressions, so he may hide or show submissive postures. Punishment after the fact will not only fail to eliminate the undesirable behavior, but could provoke other undesirable behaviors as well.

A puppy has a lot to learn in his new home. Be patient and consistent when training your new puppy and you’ll share a special bond for years to come.

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BEHAVIOR  
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# Dealing with Normal Puppy Behavior

## *Nipping and Rough Play*

**IT'S NOT ALWAYS EASY TO CONVINCE A NEW PUPPY** not to bite the hand that feeds him...pets him...or plays with him, for that matter. When puppies play with each other, they use their mouths, so they may also be inclined to bite or “mouth” your hand during play or when being petted. This is rarely aggressive behavior meant to do harm, but it is a difficult habit to break unless you encourage your puppy to try an acceptable alternative behavior. The goal is to redirect your puppy’s energy onto acceptable chew toys and to teach her to be gentle when a hand is in or near her mouth.

### Encourage Acceptable Behavior

Redirect your puppy’s penchant for nipping and biting by offering her more acceptable objects (such as chew toys) whenever you pet her. This technique can be especially effective when children want to pet her. As you or the child reaches out to scratch her behind the ears with one hand, offer the chew toy with the other. This will not only help your puppy learn that people and petting are wonderful, but will also keep her mouth busy while she’s being petted. Alternate which hand does the petting and which one has the chew toy. You may need to start off by petting or scratching your puppy for short periods of time, since the longer she’s petted, the more likely she is to get excited and start to nip.

### Discourage Unacceptable Behavior

You must also teach your puppy to be gentle with hands and show her that nipping results in unpleasant consequences. Teach your puppy that nipping “turns off” any attention and social interaction with you. As soon as a nip occurs, look your puppy right in the eye and yell “OUCH” as though you’ve been mortally wounded. Then ignore her. Leave the room if you must, but ignore her until she’s calm, and then try the chew toy and petting method again.

### Jumping Up

When your puppy jumps up on you, she wants attention. Even if you push her away, she is still getting attention (even if it is a response that you might consider negative).

#### *When Your Puppy Jumps Up:*

- Fold your arms in front of you, turn away from her, and say “off.”
- Continue to turn away from her until all four paws are on the ground, then quietly praise her and give her a treat. If she knows the “sit” command, give the command when all four paws are on the ground, then quietly praise her and give her a treat while she’s in the sitting position.
- If she begins to jump while you’re praising her, simply turn away and repeat the second step, above. Remember to keep your praise low-key.

When your puppy realizes that she gets no attention from you while she’s jumping up, but does get attention when she sits, she’ll stop jumping up. Remember, once you’ve taught her to come and sit quietly for attention, you must reward her behavior. Be careful not to ignore her when she comes and sits politely, waiting for your attention.

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## What *Not* to Do

Attempts to tap, slap, or hit your puppy in the face for nipping or jumping up are almost guaranteed to backfire. Several things may happen, depending on your puppy's temperament and the severity of the correction:

- She could become “hand-shy” and cringe or cower whenever a hand comes toward her face.
- She could become afraid of you and refuse to come to you or approach you at all.
- She could respond in a defensive manner and attempt to bite you to defend herself.
- She could interpret a mild slap as an invitation to play, causing her to become more excited and even more likely to nip.

Never play “tug-of-war” or wrestling games with your puppy if you're having a nipping problem. These types of games encourage out-of-control behavior, grabbing, lunging, and competition with you—behaviors you don't want her to learn.

## Be Consistent

It's important that all behaviors, acceptable and unacceptable, be managed consistently by all family members. And remember that any method you try will probably not be effective unless you work hard to teach your puppy an acceptable alternative behavior.

## A Note about Children and Puppies

It's very difficult for children under eight or nine years old to practice the kind of behavior modification outlined here. Children's first reaction to being nipped or mouthed by a puppy is to push the puppy away with their hands and arms. This will be interpreted by the puppy as play and will probably cause the puppy to nip and mouth even more. Adults should closely monitor all interactions between their children and dogs.

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## Related topics at [www.petsforlife.org](http://www.petsforlife.org)

- Selecting the Right Pet for Your Kids and Making the Introduction

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# Removing Pet Stains and Odors

**YOU KNOW HOW IT GOES:** The minute you turn your back, your pet decides that your new carpet is the perfect place to relieve himself. You clean and clean, but you can't get rid of that smell. What can you do?

Well, for starters, you need to find which areas are soiled and then retrain your pet to avoid eliminating in those areas. And to do that, you'll have to clean those areas, and clean them well. Here are the steps you'll need to take:

- Find all soiled areas using your nose and eyes. A black-light bulb will usually show even old urine stains. Turn out all lights in the room, use the black light to identify soiled areas, and lightly outline the areas with chalk. Black lights can be purchased at home supply stores.
  - Clean the soiled areas appropriately to remove the odors.
  - Rule out medical causes for the behavior by visiting your veterinarian.
  - Figure out why your pet is urinating or defecating in inappropriate areas. (For help, see our tips sheets "Solving Litter Box Problems," "Houstraining Your Puppy," and "Reducing Urine-Marking Behavior in Dogs and Cats." These tips sheets can be found at [www.petsforlife.org](http://www.petsforlife.org).)
  - Make the areas unattractive or unavailable. (For help, see our tip sheets on dog aversives and cat aversives. These tips sheets can be found at [www.petsforlife.org](http://www.petsforlife.org).)
  - Make the appropriate "bathroom" area attractive. (For help, see our tips sheets "Positive Reinforcement: Training Your Dog (or Cat!) with Treats and Praise," "Houstraining Your Puppy," and "Solving Litter Box Problems." These tips sheets can be found at [www.petsforlife.org](http://www.petsforlife.org).)
- Teach your pet the appropriate place to eliminate by using positive reinforcement techniques.
  - To be successful, you need to follow all these steps. If you fail to completely clean the area, your retraining efforts will be useless. As long as your pet can smell his personal scent, he'll continue to return to the "accident zone." Even if you can't smell traces of urine, your pet can. Your most important chore is to remove (neutralize) that odor with the following steps.

## To Clean Washable Items

Machine wash as usual, adding a one-pound box of baking soda to your regular detergent. It's best to air dry these items if possible.

If you can still see the stain or smell the urine, machine wash the item again and add an enzymatic cleaner (available at pet supply stores) that breaks down pet-waste odors. Be sure to follow the directions carefully.

If your pet urinates or defecates on the sheets or blankets on a bed, cover the bed with a vinyl, flannel-backed tablecloth when you begin the retraining period. It's machine washable, inexpensive, and unattractive to your pet.

## To Clean Carpeted Areas and Upholstery

For new stains, those that are still wet, soak up as much of the urine as possible with a combination of newspaper and paper towels. The more fresh urine you can remove before it dries, especially from carpet, the easier it will be to

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remove the odor. Place a thick layer of paper towels on the wet spot and cover that with a thick layer of newspaper. If possible, put newspaper under the soiled area as well. Stand on this padding for about a minute. Remove the padding and repeat the process until the area is barely damp.

If possible, put the fresh, urine-soaked paper towel in the area where it belongs—your cat’s litter box or your dog’s designated outdoor “bathroom area.” This will help remind your pet that eliminating isn’t a “bad” behavior as long as it’s done in the right place.

Rinse the “accident zone” thoroughly with clean, cool water. After rinsing, remove as much of the water as possible by blotting or by using a “wet vac.”

### **For Stains That Have Already Set**

To remove all traces of heavy stains in carpeting, consider renting an extractor or wet vac from a local hardware store. This machine operates much like a vacuum cleaner and is efficient and economical. Extracting/wet vac machines do the best job of forcing clean water through your carpet and then forcing the dirty water back out again. When using these machines or cleaners, be sure to follow the instructions carefully. Don’t use any chemicals with these machines; they work much more effectively with plain water.

Once the area is really clean, use a high-quality pet odor neutralizer available at pet supply stores. Be sure to read and follow the cleaner’s directions for use, including testing the cleaner on a small, hidden portion of fabric first to be sure it doesn’t stain.

If the area still looks stained after it’s completely dry from extracting and neutralizing, try any good carpet stain remover.

Avoid using steam cleaners to clean urine odors from carpet or upholstery. The heat will permanently set the stain and the odor by bonding the protein into any man-made fibers.

Avoid using cleaning chemicals, especially those with strong odors such as ammonia or vinegar. From your pet’s perspective, these don’t effectively eliminate or cover the

urine odor and may actually encourage your pet to reinforce the urine scent mark in that area.

If you’ve previously used cleaners or chemicals of any kind on the area, then neutralizing cleaners won’t be effective until you’ve rinsed every trace of the old cleaner from the carpet. Even if you haven’t used chemicals recently, any trace of a non-protein-based substance will weaken the effect of the enzymatic cleaner. The cleaner will use up its “energy” on the old cleaners instead of on the protein stains you want removed.

If urine has soaked down into the padding underneath your carpet, your job will be more difficult. In some cases, you may need to take the drastic step of removing and replacing that portion of the carpet and padding.

### **To Clean Floors and Walls**

If the wood on your furniture, walls, baseboard, or floor is discolored, the varnish or paint has reacted to the acid in the urine. You may need to remove and replace the layer of varnish or paint. If you do so, make sure the new product is safe for pets. Employees at your local hardware or home improvement store can help you identify and match your needs with appropriate removers and replacements. Washable enamel paints and some washable wallpapers may respond favorably to enzymatic cleaners. Read the instructions carefully before using these products and test them in an invisible area.

### **Retrain Your Pet**

Finally, in conjunction with cleaning, be sure to teach your pet where you want him to eliminate. To do this, make the “accident zone” unattractive and the appropriate “bathroom” area attractive, and see our related tip sheets at [www.petsforlife.org](http://www.petsforlife.org). The retraining period may take a week or more. Remember, it took time to build the bad habit, and it will take time to replace that habit with a new, more acceptable behavior. Treat your pet with patience and give him lots of encouragement!

### **Related topics at [www.petsforlife.org](http://www.petsforlife.org)**

- **Housetraining Your Puppy**
- **Positive Reinforcement: Training Your Dog or Cat with Treats and Praise**
- **Reducing Urine-Marking Behavior in Dogs and Cats**
- **Solving Litter Box Problems**
- **Using Aversives to Modify Your Cat’s Behavior**
- **Using Aversives to Modify Your Dog’s Behavior**

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## BEHAVIOR SERIES

# Reducing Separation Anxiety in Dogs

**E**VERYONE NEEDS A LITTLE TIME ALONE NOW AND THEN—unless of course you are a dog who suffers from separation anxiety. Dogs with separation anxiety exhibit behavior problems when they're left alone. Typically, they'll have a dramatic anxiety response within a short time (20–45 minutes) after their owners leave them. The most common of these behaviors are:

- Digging, chewing, and scratching at doors or windows in an attempt to escape and reunite with their owners
- Howling, barking, and crying in an attempt to get their owners to return
- Urination and defecation (even with housetrained dogs) as a result of distress

### Why Do Dogs Suffer from Separation Anxiety?

We don't fully understand why some dogs suffer from separation anxiety and, under similar circumstances, others don't. It's important to realize, however, that the destruction and house soiling that often occur with separation anxiety are not the dog's attempt to punish or seek revenge on his owner for leaving him alone. In reality, they are part of a panic response.

#### *Separation Anxiety Sometimes Occurs:*

- When a dog accustomed to constant human companionship is left alone for the first time
- Following a long interval, such as a vacation, during which the owner and dog are constantly together
- After a traumatic event (from the dog's point of view), such as a period of time spent at a shelter or boarding kennel
- After a change in the family's routine or structure (such as a child leaving for college, a change in work schedule, a move to a new home, or a new pet or person in the home)

### How Do I Know If My Dog Has Separation Anxiety?

Because there are many reasons for the behaviors associated with separation anxiety, it's essential to correctly diagnose the reason for the behavior before proceeding with treatment. If most, or all, of the following statements are true about your dog, he may have a separation anxiety problem:

- The behavior occurs exclusively or primarily when he's left alone.
- He follows you from room to room whenever you're home.
- He displays effusive, frantic greeting behaviors.
- The behavior always occurs when he's left alone, whether for a short or long period of time.
- He reacts with excitement, depression, or anxiety to your preparations to leave the house.
- He dislikes spending time outdoors by himself.

### What to Do If Your Dog Has Separation Anxiety

For a minor separation anxiety problem, the following techniques may be helpful by themselves. For more severe problems, these techniques should be used along with the desensitization process described in the next section.

- Keep arrivals and departures low-key. For example, when you arrive home, ignore your dog for the first few minutes, then calmly pet him. This may be hard for you to do, but it's important!
- Leave your dog with an article of clothing that smells like you—such as an old t-shirt that you've slept in recently.
- Establish a "safety cue"—a word or action that you use every time you leave that tells your dog you'll be back. Dogs usually learn to associate certain cues with short absences by their owners. For example, when you take out the garbage, your dog knows you come right back and doesn't become anxious. Therefore, it's helpful to associate a safety cue with your short-duration absences.

Some examples of safety cues are a playing radio, a playing television, or a toy (one that doesn't have dangerous fillings and can't be torn into pieces). Use your safety cue during practice sessions with your dog. Be sure to avoid presenting your dog with the safety cue when you leave for a period

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of time longer than he can tolerate; if you do, the value of the safety cue will be lost. Leaving a radio on to provide company for your dog isn't particularly useful by itself, but a playing radio may work if you've used it consistently as a safety cue in your practice sessions. If your dog engages in destructive chewing as part of his separation distress, offering him a chewing item as a safety cue is a good idea. Very hard rubber toys that can be stuffed with treats and Nylabone®-like products are good choices.

## Desensitization Techniques for More Severe Cases of Separation Anxiety

The primary treatment for more severe cases of separation anxiety is a systematic process of getting your dog used to being alone. You must teach your dog to remain calm during "practice" departures and short absences. We recommend the following procedure:

- Begin by engaging in your normal departure activities (getting your keys, putting on your coat), then sit back down. Repeat this step until your dog shows no distress in response to your activities.
- Next, engage in your normal departure activities and go to the door and open it, then sit back down.
- Next, step outside the door, leaving the door open, then return.
- Finally, step outside, close the door, then immediately return. Slowly get your dog accustomed to being alone with the door closed between you for several seconds.
- Proceed very gradually from step to step, repeating each step until your dog shows no signs of distress. The number of repetitions will vary depending on the severity of the problem. If at any time in this process your actions produce an anxiety response in your dog, you've proceeded too fast. Return to an earlier step in the process and practice this step until the dog shows no distress response, then proceed to the next step.
- Once your dog is tolerating your being on the other side of the door for several seconds, begin short-duration absences. This step involves giving the dog a verbal cue (for example, "I'll be back"), leaving, and then returning within a minute. Your return must be low-key: Either ignore your dog or greet him quietly and calmly. If he shows no signs of distress, repeat the exercise. If he appears anxious, wait until he relaxes to repeat the exercise. Gradually increase the length of time you're gone.
- Practice as many absences as possible that last less than 10 minutes. You can do many departures within one session if your dog relaxes sufficiently between departures. You should also scatter practice departures and short-duration absences throughout the day.
- Once your dog can handle short absences (30–90 minutes), he'll usually be able to handle longer intervals alone, and you won't have to repeat this process every time you are

planning a longer absence. The hard part is at the beginning, but the job gets easier as you go along. Nevertheless, you must go slowly at first. How long it takes to condition your dog to being alone depends on the severity of his problem.

## Teaching the Sit-Stay and Down-Stay

Another technique for reducing separation anxiety in your dog is practicing the common "sit-stay" or "down-stay" training exercises using positive reinforcement. Your goal is to be able to move briefly out of your dog's sight while he remains in the "stay" position and thereby teach your dog that he can remain calmly and happily in one place while you go to another. To do this, you gradually increase the distance you move away from your dog. As you progress, you can do this during the course of your normal daily activities. For example, if you're watching television with your dog by your side and you get up for a snack, tell him to stay, and leave the room. When you come back, give him a treat or praise him quietly. Never punish your dog during these training sessions.

## Interim Solutions

Because the treatments described above can take a while, and because a dog with separation anxiety can do serious damage to himself or your home in the interim, consider these suggestions to help you and your dog cope in the short term.

- Consult your veterinarian about the possibility of drug therapy. A good anti-anxiety drug should not sedate your dog, but simply reduce his anxiety while you're gone. Such medication is a temporary measure and should be used in conjunction with behavior modification techniques.
- Take your dog to a dog day care facility or boarding kennel.
- Leave your dog with a friend, family member, or neighbor.
- Take your dog to work with you, even for half a day, if possible.

## What Won't Help a Separation Anxiety Problem

- Punishing your dog. Punishment is not an effective way to treat separation anxiety. In fact, punishing your dog after you return home may actually increase his separation anxiety.
- Getting another pet as a companion for your dog. This usually doesn't help an anxious dog because his anxiety is the result of his separation from you, his person, not merely the result of being alone.
- Crating your dog. Your dog will still engage in anxiety responses in the crate. He may urinate, defecate, howl, or even injure himself in an attempt to escape from the crate.
- Leaving the radio on (unless the radio is used as a "safety cue," as described above).
- Training your dog. While formal training is always a good idea, it won't directly help a separation anxiety problem. Separation anxiety is not the result of disobedience or lack of training; it's a panic response.

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BEHAVIOR  
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# Dealing with Submissive and Excitement Urination

**M**OST PET OWNERS APPRECIATE an enthusiastic welcome from their dogs at the end of the day. But their pleasure can be substantially lessened when their dogs' wiggles of delight are coupled with a puddle of urine requiring cleanup. Your dog may have passed his housetraining with flying colors yet still not be able to control his bladder in certain situations. Submissive and excitement urination are not housetraining problems; they are involuntary reflexes that require patience and specific training methods to correct.

## Submissive Urination

With one second left in the championship game, the basketball player has to make one free throw to send the game into overtime and keep her team's hopes for victory alive. A hush comes over the arena while beads of sweat roll down her face. It's the first time she's been in this situation. She shoots the ball...and it clangs off the rim...

Just as an athlete may make a mistake when her confidence wanes in a daunting situation, so too may a dog. A dog who is threatened and lacks confidence may urinate out of submission. He may also urinate when he's being punished or verbally scolded, or when he's approached by someone he perceives to be a threat.

And just as the athlete will gain confidence as she plays in more high-pressure situations, your dog's submissive urination may resolve itself as he gains confidence. You can help to build his confidence by teaching him commands and rewarding him for obeying. You should also gradually expose him to new people and new situations and try to make sure all his new experiences are positive and happy.

## Your Dog May Have a Submissive Urination Problem If:

- He urinates when he's being scolded.
- He urinates when someone approaches him.
- He urinates when he's being greeted.
- He has a history of being treated roughly or being punished long after he has displayed unwanted behaviors.
- He is a somewhat shy, anxious, or timid dog.
- He urinates while making submissive postures, such as crouching, tail tucking, or rolling over and exposing his belly.

## What to Do If Your Dog Has a Submissive Urination Problem

- Take your dog to the veterinarian to rule out medical reasons for the behavior.
- Keep greetings low-key.
- Encourage and reward confident postures (sitting, standing) from him.
- Give him an alternative to behaving submissively. For example, if he knows a few commands, have him "sit" or "shake" as you approach, and reward him for obeying.

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- Avoid approaching him with postures that he reads as dominant. To do this:
  - Avoid direct eye contact. Look at his back or tail instead.
  - Get down on his level by bending at the knees rather than leaning over from the waist. Ask others to approach him in the same way.
  - Pet him under the chin rather than on top of the head.
  - Approach him from the side, rather than from the front, or present the side of your body to him, rather than your full front.
- Don't punish or scold him. This will only make the problem worse.

## Excitement Urination

Excitement urination occurs most often during greetings and playtime and is not accompanied by submissive posturing. Excitement urination usually resolves on its own as a dog matures. In some cases, however, the problem can persist if the dog is frequently punished or if the dog's behavior is inadvertently reinforced—such as by petting or talking to your dog in a soothing or coddling tone after he urinates when excited.

## Your Dog May Have an Excitement Urination Problem If:

- He urinates when excited, such as during greetings or playtime.
- He urinates when excited and is less than one year old.

## What to Do If Your Dog Has an Excitement Urination Problem

- Take your dog to the veterinarian to rule out medical reasons for the behavior.
- To avoid accidents, play outdoors until the problem is resolved.
- Don't punish or scold him.
- Keep greetings low-key.
- When he's excited, ignore him until he's calm.

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BEHAVIOR  
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# Reducing Urine-Marking Behavior in Dogs and Cats

**M**UCH LIKE THE MINERS DURING THE GOLD RUSH, dogs and cats are territorial animals. They “stake a claim” to a particular space, area, or object. They let other people and animals know about their claim by marking it using a variety of methods at different levels of intensity. For example, a dog may bark to drive away what he perceives to be intruders in his territory. A cat may mark a valued object by rubbing her head against it.

Some pets may go to the extreme of urinating or defecating to mark a particular area as their own. Urine-marking is not a house soiling problem. Instead, it is considered territorial behavior. Therefore, to resolve the problem, you need to address the underlying reason for your pet’s need to mark his territory in this way. Before this can be done, however, take your pet to the veterinarian to rule out any medical causes for his behavior.

## House Soiling or Urine-Marking: How to Tell the Difference

### Your Pet May Be Urine-Marking If ...

- The problem is primarily urination. Dogs and cats rarely mark with feces.
- The amount of urine is small and is found primarily on vertical surfaces. (Dogs and cats do sometimes mark on horizontal surfaces.) Leg-lifting and spraying are dominant versions of urine-marking, but even if your pet doesn’t assume these postures, he may still be urine-marking.
- Any pet in your home is not spayed or neutered. Intact males and females are both more likely to urine-mark

than are spayed or neutered animals. However, even spayed or neutered animals may mark in response to other intact animals in the home.

- Your pet urinates on new objects in the environment (a shopping bag, a visitor’s purse), on objects that have unfamiliar smells, or on objects that have another animal’s scent.
- Your pet has conflicts with other animals in your home. When there’s instability in the pack hierarchy, a dog may feel a need to establish his dominance by urine-marking his territory. If one cat is intimidating another cat, the bullied cat may express his anxiety by urine-marking.
- Your pet has contact with other animals outside your home. A cat who is allowed outdoors may come home and mark after having an encounter with another cat outside. If your pet sees another animal through a door or window, he may feel a need to mark his territory.
- Your dog marks frequently when you walk him.

### What You Can Do

- Spay or neuter your pet as soon as possible. Spaying or neutering your pet may stop urine-marking altogether. However, if he has been urine-marking for a long time, a pattern may already be established.

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- Resolve conflicts between animals in your home. (For help, see “Canine Rivalry” and “Feline Social Behavior” and “Aggression between Family Cats.”)
- Restrict your pet’s access to doors and windows through which he can observe animals outside. If this isn’t possible, discourage the presence of other animals near your house. (See “Discouraging Free-Roaming Cats.”)
- Keep your cat indoors. He’ll be safer, live longer, and feel less need to mark his territory.
- Clean soiled areas thoroughly. (See “Successful Cleaning to Remove Pet Odors and Stains.”) Don’t use strong-smelling cleaners because they may cause your pet to “over-mark” the spot.
- Make previously soiled areas inaccessible or unattractive. (See “Aversives for Dogs” and “Aversives for Cats.”) If this isn’t possible, try to change the significance of those areas to your pet. Feed, treat, and play with your pet in the areas he is inclined to mark.
- Keep objects likely to cause marking out of reach. Items such as guests’ belongings and new purchases should be placed in a closet or cabinet.
- If your pet is marking in response to a new resident in your home (such as a roommate or spouse), have the new resident make friends with your pet by feeding, grooming, and playing with him. If you have a new baby, make sure good things happen to your pet when the baby is around. (See “Preparing Your Pet for Baby’s Arrival.”)
- **For dogs:** Watch your dog when he is indoors for signs that he is thinking about urinating. When he begins to urinate, interrupt him with a loud noise and take him outside. If he urinates outside, praise him and give him a treat. When you’re unable to watch him, put your dog in confinement (a crate or small room where he has never marked) or tether him to you with a leash.

## Related topics at [www.petsforlife.org](http://www.petsforlife.org)

- Aversives for Cats
- Aversives for Dogs
- Canine Rivalry
- Discouraging Roaming Cats
- Feline Social Behavior and Aggression between Family Cats
- Nothing in Life Is Free
- Preparing Your Pet for Baby’s Arrival
- Successful Cleaning to Remove Pet Odors and Stains

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- **For dogs:** Practice “nothing in life is free” with your dog. (See “Nothing in Life Is Free.”) This is a safe, non-confrontational way to establish your leadership and requires your dog to work for everything he wants from you. Have your dog obey at least one command (such as “sit”) before you pet him, give him dinner, put on his leash, or throw him a toy. Establishing yourself as a strong leader can help stabilize the hierarchy and thus diminish your dog’s need to mark his territory.
- **For cats:** Try to monitor your cat’s movements. If he sniffs in an area he has previously marked, interrupt him with a loud noise or squirt him with water. It’s best if you can do this without him seeing you. That way, he’ll associate the unpleasantness with his intent to mark, rather than with you.

## What Not to Do

Don’t punish your pet after the fact. Punishment administered even a minute after the event is ineffective because your pet won’t understand why he is being punished.

## Pets Aren’t People

Dogs and cats don’t urinate or defecate out of spite or jealousy. If your dog urinates on your baby’s diaper bag, it’s not because he is jealous of, or dislikes, your baby. The unfamiliar scents and sounds of a new baby in the home are simply causing him to reaffirm his claim on his territory. Likewise, if your cat urinates on your new boyfriend’s backpack, it does not reflect his opinion of your taste in men. Instead, he has perceived the presence of an “intruder” and is letting the intruder know that this territory belongs to him.

## Dominance or Anxiety?

Urine-marking is usually associated with dominance behavior. Some pets, though, may mark when they feel anxious or upset. For example, a new baby in the home brings new sounds, smells, and people, as well as changes in routine. Your dog or cat probably isn’t getting as much attention as he was used to getting. All of these changes cause him to feel anxious, which may cause him to mark.

Likewise, a pet who is generally anxious may become more so by the presence of roaming neighborhood animals in your yard or by the introduction of a new cat or dog into your household. If your pet is feeling anxious, you might consider talking to your veterinarian about medications to reduce his anxiety while you try behavior modification techniques.

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