

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

During my years of involvement with puppy owners, a number of relevant questions keep recurring that relate to a puppy's behaviour which, to the new owner, can be quite concerning to them, even stressful. Therefore, in an attempt to deal with some frequently asked questions we have added the extra information to the Puppy Place in the hope that the information may be of help to all puppy owners. Before I do, however, I would like to make a few points that one should keep in mind when raising a puppy, or dog of any age for that matter. When a puppy is taken from its litter where its' social standing was well established, then adopted into a new 'human' family, the puppy would come to look upon his new family as his substitute pack. The puppy will seek direction from a distinctive 'leader' who should always keep in mind the following points:

- be patient, consistent, firm but fair;
- see situations from a dog's perspective;
- never teach using cruel methods or during displays of bad temper;
- learn to modulate one's voice and be aware of one's own body language;
- perform short training sessions regularly and always finish on a happy note;
- keep in mind the age and temperament of the puppy;
- if in doubt, give the benefit of the doubt to the dog;
- make every effort to make puppy's learning a positive experience.

Further, an owner should always be aware of the following when dealing with their puppy:

- Any behaviour reinforced (reward of any description) will increase in frequency, intensity and duration. Behaviour is directly controlled by its consequences.
- Any reinforcer must be reinforcing to the dog, not to the trainer.
- To be effective, an owner must have a relationship with the animal built on trust.

The first day in his new home often sees the puppy looking a little forlorn, with periods of whimpering (even howling) as he is missing his mum and his mates. The second day usually brings about a change in the puppy's demeanour, particularly the early morning greeting. With each passing day, the puppy begins to see a pattern forming, and he is able to recognise the smell of familiar people and objects, which of course all make him feel safe. As the days pass, without proper guidance, a puppy may develop 'bad' habits or, at least, that is how the humans in the family would describe them. However, dogs do not see any of their behaviours as either 'good' or 'bad', just a means to an end. Behaviours that are not instinctive are learned and often-unwanted behaviours are unwittingly encouraged or reinforced by the owners themselves. Nevertheless, in order to have a well-behaved adult dog, one must devote some time daily to the developing youngster and guide him/her through the formative critical periods.

Digging

Most behaviour of dogs is either the product of instinct, or a learned behaviour. Digging behaviour is no exception; it is an instinct. In addition, there are certain breeds, Terriers and Dachshunds, for instance, which were bred specifically for their ability to dig out game, such as badgers, foxes, and otters. They have an even greater digging instinct.

Dogs dig for a variety of reasons.

- Dogs will often dig out of boredom. If you leave your dog out alone in the yard for any length of time, he may dig just for something to do. Play with him out there, or provide him with chew toys with treats stuffed inside.

- Digging is often used as a means of escape. Your dog may want to leave a fenced yard because there are so many more interesting things to do elsewhere.
- If you have an intact (unspayed, or unneutered) dog, he or she may be digging to escape in order to mate with another dog. If you do not plan to breed your dog, a good way to prevent digging for this reason is to neuter him or spay her.
- Since deeper layers of soil tend to be cooler, your dog may be digging to find relief from the heat. Always provide a cool, shady place for your dog to rest when he is outside.
- Dogs are great savers. They will bury bones or other treats 'for a rainy day' when they may need them.
- If you use bone or blood meal to fertilize your garden, the scent may be irresistible. A dog may dig and dig trying to find that nonexistent bone.
- Any dog may dig to excavate a den. A female dog may dig in order to provide a nest for babies, whether she is pregnant or not.

The trick to stopping any pet's unwanted behaviour is understanding it and then manipulating it into a behaviour of which we approve. There are obvious things you can do to prevent digging, some of which are mentioned above. Here are other general solutions:

- Give your dog a place where he is permitted to dig and train him, with praise and treats, to dig in that spot and not in an inappropriate place. A good place is a sandy area, an area that has already been dug up and where the soil is loose, or an area where there is a lot of shade. A sandy area has the added benefit in that, sand is much easier to clean off than dirt.
- Decide where this place will be, soften the soil, and then bury a favourite treat there. Bring your dog over to the area, say, "dig!" and praise him when he uncovers the treat. Repeat until the behaviour is learned. If you catch him digging in an inappropriate area, say "no!" and then take him over to the desired area and say "dig," followed by praise if he digs. This training may take several days.

Digging, although deeply ingrained, can be unlearned. Be consistent and unwavering and you will be able to find a solution.

How can we stop puppy jumping up on us?

There are a number of ways of approaching this. I like to try the least forceful method first. When dealing with any unwanted behaviour, in order to have it cease, we must replace that behaviour with another that is more appropriate. First, we must be sure we are not rewarding the dog in any way at the precise time the behaviour is occurring. Examine your response when the puppy does jump on you. Could you be giving some pleasure to the puppy when he does this? Even stroking his head then pushing him down could be rewarding. Be sure that no person in the family or any visitor pets the puppy when his front feet are leaning on them. This so frequently happens and often goes unnoticed. Try turning your back to the puppy when he jumps and do not say a word. Give no attention of any sort to the puppy. Immediately his jumping ceases (once he realises it is not working he will give up), that is the time to pet and praise him, and give him a small food treat. Teach him that attention is only given when all his four feet are on the ground. To have puppy sit to receive his greeting is also advantageous, particularly around small children. To bring this about, simply have a yummy treat in your hand, let puppy smell it and, holding the treat almost touching his nose, take your hand slightly back over his head, which should bring about a sit. Immediately give the treat and then quietly praise him. Repeat several times each session, 3 or 4 sessions a day. No need to say, "sit" at this point, that comes later. By having the puppy repeat this procedure every time he greets anyone, in next to no time he will come to realise that sitting, not jumping, brings very good rewards and he will resume that position in anticipation. After many repetitions, you could add the cue "sit" immediately you know when the puppy is about to sit. It will take many repetitions of the cue word

before the puppy actually links the sound of "sit" with placing his rump on the floor, so continue to reinforce with titbits in order to have a reliable performance. To test the pup as to whether or not he understands the cue, have no treats in your hand or on you, and ask for a sit. If your puppy obliges, say "yes!" in an excited tone of voice, and leave no doubt in his mind that he has pleased you. Give him a jackpot of treats!

Occasionally one will come across a very boisterous in-your-face puppy, maybe a few months of age, so excitable that the aroma of food treats somehow escapes him. Initially, in order to get some attention, it may be necessary to introduce the 'startle kit'.

- Arm yourself with a water pistol or a clean spray bottle (turn the nozzle so the water comes out in a single stream), hide it behind your back as you venture outdoors in readiness to be mugged. As the puppy leaps up you should tell him "no!" then give him a short direct squirt to the face. This will not harm him, but it will startle him. Give the cue "no" PRIOR to the squirt so that the cue alone will later (after a few repetitions) act as a reminder of what can happen if he continues. The use of the word "no" should be said firmly but not loudly and aggressively so as to scare the puppy, and can be introduced in a number of different circumstances; for example, at the precise moment the puppy begins to chase, dig, grab, or steal etc. Startling him in this manner creates an unpleasant consequence to his behaviour and he is therefore unlikely to make the same choice again. Remember though, he must be shown an alternative behaviour, one that is rewarding to him.
- Any time the sound of "no!" causes the puppy to abort his attempt to jump and he remains on all four feet that is the time to praise and give him treats.

By carrying out these two steps when dealing with behaviours as outlined above, will help the puppy to distinguish between which of his behaviours result in unpleasantness and which ones bring rewards. Rewarding the puppy with a much sought after treat will help maintain the puppy's trust and confidence in his owner/handler. If carried out correctly, the use of the word "no" will ultimately prove to be the only deterrent needed in similar circumstances.

How to stop puppy biting the children's ankles and my hands?

This is such a common problem for most puppy owners who often mistakenly view this to be a display of aggression when in fact it is simply puppy play. Having said that though, puppies must be taught that biting humans is not acceptable. Puppies play using their mouths, as well as the rest of their bodies. When puppies wrestle with one another, one of the first lessons they learn whilst with their littermates is to inhibit the bite. If they do not and they bite too hard, their playmate will cry out and perhaps retaliate quite sharply and/or take time out, walk away and find a less boisterous companion.

It is thought that dogs see children as just another form of animal and puppies seem to identify young children strictly as playmates. Nevertheless, the puppy has to learn what he is permitted to use his teeth on and what he is not. Children should not be left unsupervised around an adult dog, let alone with a puppy. A puppy's attitude to children depends largely on his association with them during his formative growth period. All experiences with children should be positive. Any frightening or hurtful experiences caused by a child can cause the puppy to become suspicious and wary around children, particularly if the incident/s occurs during an imprint period. Ultimately, as the dog matures, a severe bite could ensue.

Children should be discouraged from running around when the puppy is in their company as this heightens the puppy's prey drive. Any moving target is fair game. If the puppy does use his mouth around the children's hands and ankles, then the children should be taught to let out a little squeal "ouch!" and leave the puppy alone for a short while and

return when puppy has quietened down. In some cases it is far simpler and safer to allow the children to run around and squeal as children love to do, and give the puppy 'time out' to rest, and play with a favourite toy. Over-excited puppies become 'mouthy' puppies.

Dealing with a very young puppy: In the case of puppy biting the hands of the adult members in the family, you could try this. With a very young puppy, at the time when puppy has hold of your hand or arm, remain perfectly still, fix your gaze directly into the eyes of the puppy if practicable, and give a deep 'throaty' growl (practice alone a few times beforehand). If your 'growl' has been at all dog like, the puppy should release his grip. Walk away and ignore him for a few minutes. Repeat when necessary. The biting will begin to diminish over time. Remember to praise when puppy DOES NOT bite your arm or hands.

If a puppy is feeling particularly 'mouthy' and seems intent on using some part of your body on which to practice his skills, try distracting him by offering an alternative by way of a toy. Encourage him to focus on the toy and when he does, praise him verbally in a kind, soft tone with something like "there's a good boy" simply because he is chewing on HIS toy.

Dealing with an older puppy: If the play biting has gone unchecked, it probably has escalated in intensity and may have taken on a new meaning. Now the adult members must be vigilant and very firm when getting the message across to the dog. Instead of simply making the growl sound when he is attached, I recommend you grab a handful of skin behind his ears, give a firm shake while 'growling' and pin the pup to the ground until you feel no resistance. Walk away. The stand you take is establishing your position as the 'pack' leader. You must be in control, not your dog!

My young dog has started pulling on the clothes from the clothesline. What can I do?

Try this. Hang some old rags on the line. Fill some balloons with water and hang them with the rags. I hope that when 'Fido' jumps up, takes a mouthful of cloth he also bites into a balloon and gets a face full of water. Again, similar to the method used for the previous question, the dog is responsible for his dilemma, not his owner.

To simply wait and try to catch him in the act, telling him firmly "NO!" may be effective whilst you are at home but because YOU put a stop to his fun, may cause him to wait until you are away from home and then back to the clothesline

My puppy is up ending my pot plants. How can I protect them?

I would suggest that you do not plant or weed the garden with your puppy looking over your shoulder. There is nothing more a puppy likes than to rummage around in freshly dug soil. There are so many lovely smells in that cool moist dirt. In addition, those fascinating worms and beetles! Put puppy away out of sight. Perhaps confine him somewhere safe and give him a doggy chew, a bone or dog biscuit to keep him amused whilst you dig. Pot plants are indeed inviting to an inquisitive puppy. Anything that can be put up out of reach will have a greater chance of surviving the first 12 months of puppy life. I am a believer in the old adage "prevention is better than cure". However, if those pot plants are needed at ground level, I have a couple of suggestions. Sprinkle cayenne pepper around the soil. Even add a few chopped pieces of red chilli for those persistent wreckers. Another suggestion is to set a few small mousetraps (do not add any food bait of course), and turn them upside down on the soil of the planter. Any attempt to touch them will set them off, causing them to leap off the planter and hopefully startle the pup and have him think twice before venturing there again. In situations like this, using a corrective method that does not link the owner with the correction has the dog believing that it was his own behaviour that brought about the unpleasant reaction.