

Avoiding Problem Behaviors in Dogs

Just like children, dogs too need to learn socialization skills and manners in order to get along in the family and society. 90% of the dogs turned in to a shelter by their owners have had virtually no training.

More dogs are put to sleep annually in animal shelters than die from diseases. Most of these dogs are under one year of age. The reasons are many, but certainly a major contributor is people's expectations of what dogs are all about, and people's failure to successfully guide their pups into healthy adulthood. Many of these dogs have not learned even the most basic manners, and can consequently have more serious behavior problems. The most important requirements to raise your dog into a healthy well-mannered dog, is proper diet, adequate exercise and socialization, and proper, consistent training either through a school or regular in-home sessions.

This flyer is only meant to address some of the most common behavior problems and suggest very basic preventive measures. To avoid further problems, we suggest you enroll your dog in a puppy manners class or an adult dog basic training class right away. By taking the time to teach your dog basic manners, you will be raising a dog who will be a pleasure to have around.

Destructiveness

All puppies chew, dig and bark. In most cases, this is the result of boredom. Dogs are very bright, as well as energetic, animals. To avoid annoying behaviors such as destructiveness, barking, and digging, they must be provided with activities that exercise both their minds and their bodies and on a REGULAR basis. Daily exercise, play, and training are critical. Provide your pup with safe, appropriate chew toys, and restrict his/her access to items you value, such as remote controls, shoes, clothing, purses, etc. Block off (with temporary fencing) areas of the yard you don't want destroyed. Many puppies outgrow some of their tendencies to dig, but many continue this habit because due to boredom and loneliness.

If your pup spends several hours alone while you are gone during the day, leave him/her with "home alone toys" such as Buster Cubes, activity balls, and stuffed Kongs. Consider having a neighbor or pet sitter drop by and play with the pup midway through the day. With proper preventive measures, you can protect your belongings as well as provide adequate entertainment for your puppy so that their teething and natural tendencies to chew are kept to a minimum.

Aggression Around Food

Many pups have no problem when people come near their food bowls. Unfortunately, we are sometimes surprised to find that puppies who growl in warning when they are young often bite when they are older. First, teach your pup to sit before you put the bowl on the floor. This is very easy to teach. You can teach it separately or you can simply stand with the bowl patiently until your pup sits. Say "Yes!" and put the bowl on the floor. Gradually increase the amount of time you require the pup to stay sitting before putting the food down. Second, teach your pup that good things happen when people (of all ages, especially toddlers and young children) approach his/her food bowl. Take some yummy treats like hot dogs or cheese, and toss them into the bowl while the puppy is eating. Sit next to the pup with



an empty food bowl and fill it a few pieces of kibble at a time, sometimes tossing in something really yummy. Pick the bowl up and put something great in it and put it down. Feed the pup in different locations so she/he doesn't become protective of one spot in the kitchen. Note: If you have a dog that stiffens, growls, or snarls when you approach him/her around the food bowl or when she/he is chewing on a toy or treat, get professional help from a positive reinforcement trainer or behavior specialist. A more extensive behavior modification program will be necessary.

Aggression Towards People

The reasons dogs become aggressive toward people are many, but usually, it is because of an underlying fear based upon poor early socialization. The best way to ensure that your dog is safe around people of all types is to religiously practice a socialization program from a very young age. If you have a dog who appears extremely fearful of people (avoidance, tail between the legs, ears flattened, etc.), obtain the services of a positive reinforcement trainer or behavior specialist. a desensitization/counter-conditioning behavior modification program may be necessary.

Aggression Towards Other Dogs

The reason dogs become aggressive toward other dogs is primarily because of poor early socialization. The best way to ensure that your dog gets along with others of its own species is to religiously practice a socialization program from a very young age. Lifelong exposure to a variety of different dogs is important to avoiding this all-too-common problem. Again, if you have a dog who appears aggressive around other dogs, obtain the services of a positive reinforcement trainer or behavior specialist. A desensitization behavior modification program may be necessary.

Separation Anxiety

This is one of the most common behavior problems presented to veterinarians. It is a complex behavior problem that can have its root in many causes. However, to ensure that your puppy doesn't suffer from anxiety when left alone, make sure that you avoid having the puppy become overly dependent upon your physical presence. From a young age, accustom your pup to being alone for a few hours. Start by having your pup stay in another room of the house where she/he can see and hear you, but not be with you all the time. A barrier such as a baby gate can be very helpful. Build up to longer periods of time and, eventually, to having your pup stay in a room of the house where she/he cannot see you, but can hear you. Next, she/he should learn to tolerate time alone with you in the house when she/he cannot see nor hear you. From there, you should not have a problem with being out of the house for short periods of time and, eventually, longer and longer periods of time. Many puppies suffer separation anxiety when people bring the new puppy home over a holiday or summer vacation. The pup is surrounded by people 100% of the time for several days (or months!), and then when everyone goes back to work or school, is suddenly left all alone. Avoid this scenario by implementing the steps above on a regular basis and, minimally, several days or weeks before you return to work after a long period of absence. If all else fails there is medication that is extremely helpful with this problem. ask your veterinarian if this applies in your situation.

Additional sources for help:

1. Local puppy/adult dog classes (check out local phone book)
2. Internet sources; check out hsus.org or aspc.org or just type in a search engine whatever problem you are seeking an answer for and you will find a myriad of solutions to try.
3. Dog behavioral consultants
- 4 Dog training books at bookstores or the Internet