

ELIMINATION AND HOUSE TRAINING IN DOGS

REGRESSION IN HOUSE-TRAINING

House training a pet can make or break their relationship with you. In fact, house soiling is one of the most common behavior problems. Your tolerance for accidents will decrease as your puppy grows, due in part to your expectation that the dog's self-control will improve as the pup matures. Yet, any dog can have lapses in manners from time to time. Control can be affected by stress or illness. For this reason, house soiling in dogs who have previously shown consistent cooperation with your plan to civilize their toilet habits should be reported to your veterinarian. Investigation of an underlying medical problem is the first step, particularly in adult dogs.

In the absence of a medical cause, consider the possibility that your pets' misbehavior is an emotional reaction, such as anxiety or fear. Is your dog increasingly frightened by thunderstorms? Is your aging dog being challenged for dominance by a younger dog?

House training habits can also be affected your own mood and stress level. Has your dogs routine been changed by longer work hours or inclement weather? Are you sidetracked because of problems at work or in your relationships? Your dogs house soiling could result from irregular walks or because of anxiety. Some anxious dogs void in a location that is strongly associated with you. For example, your bed could become a target.

LIFETIME HABITS

Distracted with life, the amount of time and attention we have to devote to our dogs will inevitably vary from time to time. During stressful periods, we are tempted to forego leash walks and instead leave the dog to his or her own devices in the back yard. Sometimes, pet owners become complacent, or think adult dogs do not need to go for walks in their company. But dogs still benefit from routine, as we do, and leash walks at predictable intervals are important to maintain house manners. Dogs need lifelong reinforcement for eliminating outside. Otherwise, this too can contribute to house soiling problems. Besides, spending quality time with someone you love will reduce your own stress level.

DOGS DON'T KNOW RIGHT FROM WRONG

Don't you believe that your dog should 'know better' when he/she has done something that displeases you? Some pet owners are convinced that their dogs know they have done wrong and act guilty following an episode of house soiling. The concept of what is right or wrong is a complex and uniquely human perspective. Guilt is also part of the human condition and is not something your dog can ever experience. What you call a guilty look is really the facial expression of an anxious dog combined with a submissive, cowering stance. More that likely, your pet only understands that you are upset (but not what about) and is trying to avoid or curtail your impending punishment. Your dog is

reacting to what is happening right at this moment, not to the memory of something that happened minutes or hours earlier. Take a deep breath and ignore the mess. Focus on the preventative steps described below.

DOGS KNOW RIGHT FROM WRONG

Don't punish your dog for inappropriate elimination, even if you catch your pet red-handed. If your dog has become less civilized in your home, consider these steps:

- Go back to the basics. Take your dog for long walks at regular intervals so that he/she has frequent opportunity to void in as appropriate place. You should be outside within one-half hour following every meal and nap (or sooner). Take your dog out every few hours during the day anyway, just in case. Every act of waste production should be met immediately with jubilant praise.
- Thoroughly disinfect and deodorize the soiled area so that persistent odors do not attract repeat performances. Apply diluted white vinegar to a carpeted target. Blot dry and sprinkle on dry baking soda. Vacuum when it dries. Enzyme products can also be effective.
- If your pet revisits the spot with more misbehavior, clean it up again. This time, block access to it with an obstacle, such as a piece of furniture. Alternatively, feed your pet at or near this spot or simply place a bowl of water there.
- Make an appointment to see your veterinarian, who can make sure there is no physical cause for your pet's behavior change.

COPROPHAGIA (EATING STOOL)

Coprophagia (coprophagy), the ingestion of feces, is a normal maternal behavior in dogs and cats, and many other species. Most dogs will eventually outgrow this unappealing habit. A few will need to be closely supervised to make sure they do.

After delivering her puppies, the bitch (mother dog) must make sure her babies are clean and dry. She will stimulate urination and defecation by licking the puppies and clean the waste that is produced. This will also keep the pups healthy and disease-free. Another important function of maternal coprophagia is to prevent odors that might draw parasites and predators to the babies.

Pups may become briefly coprophagic when their mother ceases the task. Coprophagia in pups is usually short-lived but some puppies continue even when they are removed from their litters and placed in their new homes.

Various solutions have been used to discourage coprophagia in dogs:

- Application of foul-tasting substances to feces is intended to make the behavior an aversive experience. The bottom line, however, is that in the time it takes to apply these products you could simply pick up the waste so it is unavailable to your dog.

- Addition of substances that induce vomiting may fail for many of the same reasons.
- Feeding digestive (pancreatic) enzymes to the coprophagic dog may alter the consistency of stools, but this method is unreliable.

The best way to correct coprophagia is to prevent it,. Coprophagia is discussed in detail in another handout but is summarized here.

- Walk your dog on a leash and move away from the stool. If your dog is defecating, control the head with the leash as you bag the mess. Reward your dog for good behavior with your praise and a tiny but tasty food treat.
- Discontinue access to your yard, relying on a leash walks during retraining, unless you remain next to your dog to remove deposits before they can be consumed.
- Remove stool deposits from your yard right away.
- Give your dog a wide variety of appealing chew toys every day.

ROLLING IN IT

Your dog is sniffing at something with great interest. Suddenly, you watch helplessly as your pet drops onto the ground and rolls in the source of this fascinating scent. Sometimes, you will be appalled to discover that your dog has rolled in the feces of another animal, or on a dead animal. You may not see anything at all, but you may well smell something less than delightful on your dogs back.

Although this form of self-marking is not clearly understood, the dog identifies with the scent it has discovered by rolling in it. Some suggest that this perfume may make the dog more interesting in some way to other dogs! Rolling in stool is a normal behavior in other species and is thought to have a function in predatory behavior. A hunting predator may roll in the feces of the prey animal to disguise its own scent and avoid detection.

Fortunately, this behavior is easily controlled by walking your dog on a leash so that you can control the drop and roll. Prevent access by other animals to your property with a fence or a motion-activated lighting system. Clean stool from your yard every day. Your dog might find something irresistible despite your best efforts. In that case, it's bath time!

SUBMISSIVE URINATION

Submissive greetings by insecure or young pups often are accompanied by involuntary urination. This submissive urination is common in young dogs who have not yet achieved adult status in your family pack. Submissive urination has nothing to do with how well a puppy is house trained. This is an involuntary physiological response to a basic social behavior in dogs. It has nothing to do with voluntary sphincter control which is the basis of house training dogs.

Submissive urination is more common in young females than in young males, but either, it usually resolves as the pup gains confidence. It may persist into adulthood in some dogs who remain anxious for any number of reasons, including human caretakers who unintentionally (or intentionally) intimidate them.

In a nutshell: Keep greetings (yours, family, friends) brief and calm. Keep your voice soothing and avoid quick movements. Don't stare or look directly at your anxious pup. Look just past your dogs head or at the floor as you enter the door. Let your pup come to you and crouch down to receive the welcome. Don't punish or scold your pup for any piddles or puddles. Take your puppy right outside and praise elimination outdoors!