



DEALING WITH COMMON PROBLEMS IN PUPPY'S 1ST YEAR

INTRODUCTION

Descended from and related to the wolf, the dog is at once an alien creature and a highly adapted (and adaptable) human playmate and friend. Thousands of years ago, dogs gave up their wild ways to live among people, and we got the better of the deal. In exchange for food, shelter, and nurturing, the dog became a working partner, a hunter, guardian, herder, and dispatcher of vermin. He powered sleds and carts, accompanied herds and flocks to market, and, when man gained leisure time, provided entertainment and opportunities to prove owners' abilities in breeding and prowess in training. Today, the presence of nearly 60 million dogs in family households pays tribute to the special bond that exists between our two species. Today, more than anything else, dogs are human companions.

Unfortunately, dog-and-people relationships are not all peaches and cream. Dog bites are a major problem, dog owners often misunderstand dog behavior, and communities are often in an uproar over loose dogs, destructive dogs, noisy dogs, and inconsiderate owners of bratty dogs. As a result, city councils pass laws restricting or banning breeds or limiting the number of dogs per household; insurance companies decline to insure some breeds; and people become afraid of certain breeds or of medium-to-large dogs in general. Research shows that 1 in 8 dogs will end up in a shelter or a rescue because the owners of these pets did not know what to expect when they acquired the puppy or young adult dog and were unable to find the help they needed to resolve the problems that ensued.

NORMAL DOG BEHAVIOR

It's no big revelation that dog behavior is what makes Fido act like a dog. The eye-opener is that there are gaps between dog behavior and people's expectations - and this can have serious ramifications. A knowledge of canine behavior can help alleviate the problems that can plague a dog-rich society. Dog bites can be prevented, dogs can be kept out of shelters, and more dogs can find new homes or stay in the homes they already have if owners understand what makes Fido tick. Following are the most common puppy and young dog blunders - natural behaviors gone awry. If these mistakes can be prevented or corrected, Fido and his family have a better chance at living happily ever after.

PUNISHMENT

In order for punishment to be effective, it must be administered at the time the offense is committed. Physical punishment of a puppy is rarely necessary. Startling a puppy with a stern "NO" or rattling a can containing pebbles or coins is usually adequate.

A remote correction is used so the puppy doesn't associate you with the correction. This can be achieved with a hand-held air-horn. An example of a remote correction would be if your puppy is digging a hole or barking and you blast the air-horn and don't let him know you made the noise. This way he won't associate the punishment with you.

Never punish your puppy after the fact. He will have no idea why you are correcting him because the offense he committed occurred too long ago. Whenever you correct your puppy, always make him sit and then praise the good behavior of sitting.

BARKING

Barking is a normal response for all dogs to some external stimuli in their environment. When outdoors, your puppy may see other dogs, strangers, kids, a cat or any number of things at which to bark. As a good neighbor, you should never leave your dog outdoors unattended if he is a barker. You should always monitor his activity and bring him indoors if his barking might bother a neighbor. If your puppy barks for attention, give him a stern "NO BARK," make him sit, and praise him for sitting. If he continues to bark, isolate him in a room where he is left alone so he will learn that barking will get him banished from family activities.

BITING HANDS AND MOUTHING

Puppies must be taught to be gentle when their mouths and teeth come in contact with a human. If your puppy gently puts his mouth on your hand, that's okay for now. As he gets older, around 12-16 weeks of age, you should discourage him from placing his mouth on your hands. If he bites down on your hand a little too hard, you should "yelp" very loudly, then turn and walk away. Your puppy will learn that if he bites a human too hard, he will lose his playmate. Be sure to provide him with plenty of items he is allowed to chew on.

DESTRUCTIVE CHEWING

A puppy is unable to use his paws to pick up items so he resorts to chewing on them instead. Chewing is a very natural behavior for a puppy so it is important to direct him to chew on items which you provide for him. Until your puppy is older and you can trust him not to be destructive, you should never leave him unattended. If you leave him unattended, eventually he will destroy something important.

To prevent destructive chewing:

- Confine Fido whenever you cannot watch him
- Provide plenty of appropriate items to chew
- Give Fido a chew-toy to distract him away from the furnishings when he's in a chewing mood
- Use a repellent such as bitter apple or bitter lime on furniture, rugs, baseboards, etc. that Fido tries to chew
- Always praise Fido for chewing the right stuff

Providing a supply of items to chew on is the key to preventing destructive behavior.. Praise him when he chews on the items you provide. It is a good idea to give him an item to chew on when he is left unattended in his crate or dog cage. Buy several different items, and rotate them to keep him interested in chewing.

DIGGING

Digging is a normal canine activity. Your puppy may smell a mole or chipmunk in the flowerbed and try to dig it out. He may want to bury and hide a favorite bone. He may make a game out of tugging on a shrub or plant root. If it is too hot, he may dig a hole under a bush or shrub to stay cool.

Unless you are outside to stop the behavior, digging is a very difficult problem to solve. If you can determine why your puppy is digging you can usually correct the behavior. If there is a chipmunk in the flowerbed, expect your puppy to continue digging until you get rid of it. If he is too hot, consider a plastic, child's wading pool to cool him as well as some type of shaded area. If he is bored, provide plenty of chew items. You can build a digging pit by digging up a three

foot by three foot area of soil and mixing a lot of sand into the soil to make digging easier. Next bury items for him to dig up such as a large, non-splintering, tasty bone or rawhide. Start by partially burying the item so it is easy to find. After he gets the idea, bury them deeper. His reward will be to chew on the item he digs up and this good behavior will hopefully keep him from digging up desirable areas of the yard.

If you catch him digging, a stern "NO DIG" may suffice. If not, try startling him with a loud noise such as an air horn. If you go outside and find a new hole, do not scold him. You have to catch him in the act of digging for the punishment to work.

HANDLING

Eventually all dogs will need to have their toenails trimmed, their ears cleaned, their hair combed or their teeth brushed. If you try to trim a dog's nails for the first time when he weighs 80 pounds, good luck. You will most likely have a wrestling match on your hands with both you and your dog becoming very unhappy.

How do you get a dog to become accustomed to these types of procedures? You need to start doing nail trims and ear cleanings when your puppy is eight weeks old. Get him used to having just the tips of his nails trimmed. Do one or two nails at a time and trim just the sharp tips so you don't cut them too close and make them bleed. You don't want to hurt your puppy and have him become fearful. After trimming a few nails reward him with a food treat or play his favorite game. Help him associate the event with something he really enjoys. You want him to know that every time he gets his nails trimmed, you are going to play fetch with him. Do the same thing when you clean his ears or brush his teeth. When your puppy is near you, handle his feet, look in his ears and open his mouth. If you do this every time he is around, he will become desensitized to having it done.

Anything you will ever have to do with your dog when he is older, you must first get him accustomed to between eight and 16 weeks of age. Repeating these things frequently and making a game out of them will make these chores much more pleasant when he is older. Start now and get him desensitized to potentially unpleasant procedures.

MOUNTING BEHAVIOR

Mounting is not always a sexually-motivated behavior. Dogs mount other dogs in order to show control or dominance. If small children are the target and they cannot defend themselves, you will have to intervene. If your puppy is mounting a small child, say to the puppy in a stern voice "OFF." If adults or older children are involved, instruct them to turn and walk away without saying anything when the puppy first attempts to mount. Your puppy will soon get the message.

JUMPING AND PAWING

When your puppy jumps up and places his paws on you, he is seeking your attention. If you allow him to jump up when he is a puppy, he will want to do the same thing when he is an adult. If you push him down or "knee" him in the chest, he is still getting your attention, even if it is negative of attention. The best response is to turn and walk away without saying anything. When your pup next approaches you, make him sit before he has the opportunity to jump up, then reward and praise him for sitting. Your puppy must always sit for everything he receives, and when he sits, you must reward him for his good behavior.

ROUGH PLAY

When you play physical games with your puppy, you are teaching him that hands and arms are fun things to grab. Younger children in the family pay the price for the rough play instigated by older children or adults. It is better to use toys as play objects and have your puppy learn to fetch them when thrown.

Karen Overall DVM of the Behavioral Clinic at the University of Pennsylvania College of Veterinary Medicine said that “rough play is appropriate only if the owner can recognize the difference between a playful and a non-playful growl; can interpret canine facial signs, and always in a tug-of-war, is able to win with the puppy releasing the toy.”

If your puppy steals an item such as a sock or piece of clothing, and you chase him, he will soon learn that stealing things is a good way to get your attention. For some, it is fun to interact with their puppy in this manner. If you don't enjoy this game, the next time your puppy steals an item and runs from you, turn and walk in the opposite direction.

AGGRESSION

Prevention is easier than cure. Puppies that from the start are taught good manners are far less likely to become aggressive than dogs that are allowed to climb the dominance ladder or dogs that are teased into fearful behavior patterns. Owners of potentially aggressive dogs must be vigilant; many of these dogs do not like children in general or a few children in particular. Some of them love the children in the family but are quirky with visiting friends.

To avoid behaviors that can lead to aggression, make sure the puppy learns from day one that the humans in the family are in charge of his destiny. Feed him every meal – don't leave his bowl on the floor for leisure dining – and pick up the dish in 15 minutes whether it's empty or not. Take him out – don't give him free access to outside. Require him to sit, lie down, walk on a leash, stay behind a gate or in a crate – don't give him carte blanche to do his own thing.

Although recent research indicates that rough play may not cause aggression, it is wise to shun such play because it can encourage aggression in some dogs. It is especially important that children not indulge in rough and tumble play or tug-of-war with a pushy dog.

Supervise all contact between the puppy and children! Teach children how to care for and love dogs, so that they understand that dogs respond to kindness but dislike teasing and rough treatment. Among the lessons: Dogs are threatened by hugging, squeezing, or grabbing of their body parts and often respond by snapping, nipping, or with full-fledged bites. Running, screaming, and squealing can trigger prey drive in certain dogs and result in injury to a child.

RUNNING AWAY

Once again, prevention is far easier to manage than the recipe for a cure. Tools for teaching dogs to stay home are a leash, a fence, and enrollment in an obedience class.

- Unless confined to an enclosed area, Fido should be walked on a leash so he doesn't get the opportunity to take off.
- Sturdy fences will keep Fido home and provide a barrier to temptation. Visible fences also keep wandering dogs and neighborhood cats and kids from entering the yard.
- Obedience classes provide techniques for canine management, techniques such as teaching Fido to sit before going outside so he's not as likely to dive through an open door.

A dog that already indulges his wanderlust by digging under or climbing over the fence should never be allowed outside without supervision. If Fido persists in digging or climbing even when supervised, installation of a hot wire – a wire charged by an electric fence battery – at the top of the fence for climbers and the bottom of the fence for diggers may be the answer to keeping the dog at home.

A word of caution: a tether is not the answer to keeping Fido at home. Dogs become very jealous of their space when tied outside and they can become aggressive to children or animals that enter that space. If your dog must be outside on his own, even for short periods, he needs a dog house with a shaded pen.

MOTION SICKNESS

Do not feed your puppy prior to a car ride. Take him on many short trips and gradually increase the length of the rides once he becomes accustomed to the motion of the car. Take plenty of paper towels or newspapers to shove under him if he starts to vomit. If he is still getting sick when you take him in the car, you can administer an over the counter motion sickness drug by the name of Bonine, Meclizine or Antivert. These drugs are usually sold as 25 mg tablets. One hour before going for the car ride, you can give 6.25 to 12.5 mg (1/4 to 1/2 tablet if 25 mg tablet) for puppies under 10 pounds; 12 to 25 mg (1/2 to 1 tablet if 25 mg. tablet) for puppies 10-20 pounds; and one whole 25 mg tablet for puppies over 20 pounds. If you take your puppy on frequent short trips in the car, he will eventually not get sick and you will not have to administer medication.

EATING FECES

Nobody is absolutely sure why dogs eat their own feces. Some feel there are ingredients in the feces that have nutritional value. It is unlikely there is a deficiency in a dog's diet if he is being fed any name brand food.

Some puppies left confined in crates or cages for long periods may eat their own feces due to boredom. Puppies should not be left in a crate all day. If a puppy cannot be taken out of his crate to eliminate during the day, he should be confined to a small room with his cage door open. Place newspapers on the floor so if he has to eliminate he can leave his crate and go on the papers.

If your puppy is eating his own or another animal's feces, you must catch him in the act and try to startle him as soon as he even sniffs the feces. You may use a hand-held air-horn, a can with pebbles or a loud noise to startle him. Don't let him know you are the one making the noise. If he associates you with the noise, he will wait until you are not around to eat the feces. Picking up the feces before he has a chance to reach them is the best prevention.