

Solving Common Behavior Issues in Dogs

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Dogs learn through immediate consequences of their behavior.

- The nature of these consequences determine how they will behave in the future
- If a behavior results in something rewarding like food, attention or belly rubs, the dog is more likely to repeat the behavior, i.e.: sitting for attention.
- If a behavior does not result in something rewarding, your dog will offer it less and less. i.e.: barking for attention.



Four easy steps to solving behavior issues

1. Identify the behavior you want to resolve: Common examples are “My dog jumps on people” or “My dog barks at dogs walking by” or “My dog digs in the yard.” You can fill in the blank for a behavior that you wish your dog would not do!

2. Prevent or manage the behavior from occurring: The more opportunities your dog has to practice the unwanted behavior, the better they get at it.

For example, if your dog jumps on people, do not allow her to run freely through a party where she can practice the jumping behavior. Instead, put your dog in another room or in her crate until you are ready to work on the behavior.

If you are walking down the street and a person asks to pet your dog, you can lower her leash until it hits the ground, and then step on the leash to prevent your dog from practicing the jumping behavior. You are not pinning your dog to the ground in any way--she can sit, lie down or stand up--she just can't lift her feet up to jump on the person.

3. Reward the absence of unwanted behaviors: In the example of jumping, you should praise, pet and treat your dog any time she approaches a person and doesn't jump.

4. Train a new desirable behavior to replace the unwanted behavior: Using positive reinforcement teach your dog to sit when people approach by rewarding them with attention, praise and treats.

With practice, these steps will help reduce unwanted behaviors, like jumping, and replace them with desired behaviors, like sitting.



This formula can be applied to any behavior problem you observe with your pet. Remember training your pet takes time, patience, practice and repetition.

Quick tips for common behavior concerns

Problem	Quick Management Solution	Comments
Your dog pees on the carpet.	Keep your dog off the carpet unless you know she is "empty" and safe.	Use doors or baby gates to keep your dog in an acceptable bathroom area, or use a crate to confine your dog. Reward your dog for "going" in the right place.
Your dog chews inappropriate items (remotes, wallets, shoes, socks, kid's toys, the mail, etc.).	Put loose objects out of your dog's reach: on a high shelf, in a cabinet or closet, or in a room closed off by door or baby gate.	Provide attractive, "legal" chew toys and praise your dog for chewing on them.
Your dog barks at people passing by the house.	Prevent your dog from detecting the presence of people outside.	Shut the curtains, move the couch away from the window. Install a solid fence or plant a hedge along it to reduce dog's view (or hearing) of the street. Keep your dog crated for short absences from the home.
Your dog pulls on the leash.	Use a front-lead harness or head halter.	Train your dog to walk on a loose leash by rewarding any leash slack and refusing to continue the walk when he pulls.
Your dog "attacks" the lawn mower, water hose, vacuum cleaner or other household items.	Put your dog in another part of the home before using the item.	Train your dog to accept the item by pairing low-intensity exposure to the item with treats when he is calm. Slowly (over many sessions) increase the intensity of the exposure, rewarding your dog when he remains calm.
Your dog digs up the yard or garden, or lies in the flower beds.	Put a low but sturdy fence around landscaped areas.	If your dog loves to dig, provide a sandbox with occasional buried treats or toys. The sand will be cleaner than dirt, and your dog will be rewarded for satisfying his digging urge in an area of your choice. Make sure your dog is cool enough (in summer) and warm enough (in winter), as digging can be a method of heat control.
Your dog gets on the furniture.	Keep your dog out of that room when alone. Turn the chair against a wall or upend it. Place a cookie sheet, box or baby gate over chair or bed.	Consider putting a blanket or sheet over the furniture and allowing the dog to enjoy its comfort. The cover is easily removed and cleaned.



Your dog runs into the street.	Keep your dog on leash or within a well-fenced yard.	This can save her life!
Multiple dogs in your home fight over mealtimes, doorways, etc.	Feed them in separate areas (separate rooms, in crates or on tie-downs). Hold one dog back while letting the other dog through the doorway.	Train each dog to "wait" at doorways, and release one at a time using their own names.

If you have a pet behavior question or would like some training assistance,
 San Diego Humane Society is here to help!
 Visit our website at www.sdhumane.org to view our behavior and training options,
 or call our **Behavior Helpline at 619-299-7012 ext. 2244** to speak with a trainer.