



GET HELP!

Expert advice for
managing a dog's behavior

INSIDE

PET ASSESSMENT

Is your dog
misbehaving?
You're not alone!

8 myths about dogs' behavior

Plus the facts about
why they misbehave
and what you can
do about it

SERIOUS SOLUTIONS

10 situations to
avoid with an
aggressive dog

Does your dog misbehave?

No judgement, if so. But maybe we can help! Read through this list. Does your pet display any of these behaviors?

Does your dog ...

Behave aggressively toward people (bite, growl, snarl, bare its teeth)?

Soil in the house?

Escape from the yard?

Destroy things in the house?

Dig, chew, or otherwise destroy items outside?

Disobey your commands?

Behave aggressively toward other animals?

Vocalize too much (bark, howl, whine)?

Have too much energy?

Act unfriendly?

Need too much attention?

Are you planning to add a pet to your home?

Yes



We want to help you!

If your pet is displaying any behavior problems, we'd like to help. So let's talk about anything that would make your life together happier or more peaceful and find solutions that work for you.

Get off on the right foot

And if you're considering acquiring another pet, let us know that, too! We can help you find the perfect breed for your lifestyle and advise you about where you can find a happy, healthy pet to join your family.

Myth # 1

It's my fault, I just know it.
I should have done a better job
training my dog.

A variety of factors play a role in the development of behavior problems, including a pet's genetics, early experiences, and environment. While you can certainly worsen a pet's behavior problem with inappropriate training methods, it is highly unlikely that you caused your pet's behavior problems. Many medical conditions and medications can also contribute to behavior changes, so your veterinarian is the best person to consult first when your pet exhibits worrisome behaviors.

FACT: Don't hesitate to ask your veterinarian about any problem that may affect your pet's health and well-being. Most behavior problems are at least manageable—if not always curable. But the sooner you seek qualified advice, the higher the likelihood you can successfully treat the problem.



Myth #2

My dog is aggressive/
fearful/shy because he/she
was abused as a puppy.

While this may be a possibility in the case of some re-homed dogs whose exact histories are unknown, the most common cause of fearful behavior in dogs is inadequate or inappropriate early socialization. Fearful behavior is also heritable, so some dogs are born with a predisposition to shyness or fearfulness. Proper socialization may be even more critical in these individuals.

FACT: No matter the cause, dogs that exhibit fearful or anxious behavior frequently may be suffering and should be evaluated by a veterinarian. These animals can be helped in many different ways.



Myth #3

That new medication I heard about is clearly the solution to my pet's <insert behavior problem here>.

Medications alone rarely completely solve a behavior problem. Behavior modification and environmental modification are usually necessary to achieve long-term, lasting improvement. Some medications have been shown to increase the speed with which the behavior modification takes effect and can be considered another useful tool in treating behavior problems, but they are not the sole remedy.

FACT: Medications can play an important role in the treatment of a behavior problem but only if used appropriately as a part of a complete treatment plan.



Myth #4

Dogs that are aggressive are acting dominant.

While some dogs truly exhibit dominance aggression, they are much rarer than the popular media would have you believe. The problem with outdated dominance theories is that they result in the recommendation of confrontational styles of training based on the erroneous belief that owners have to physically dominate their dogs. Not only is this dangerous, but it is usually ineffective and has resulted in damage to the human-animal bond far more often than it has led to success.

FACT: Most dogs with aggression problems are anxious or afraid and are more likely to respond to reward-based training under the supervision of a qualified animal behaviorist or board-certified veterinary behaviorist.



Myth #5

He must be angry with me. He knows what he did was wrong.

Many dogs show submissive behaviors when their owners arrive home. These behaviors of tucking the tail, lowering the ears, avoiding eye contact, and slinking away do not mean “I am sorry” in dog language. They mean “Quit acting angry at me.” They mean that the dog has learned to associate the return of people to the home with the presence of feces, garbage, or other destroyed items on the floor. The dog is not angry—he is afraid because in the past when people arrived and these items were on the floor, he was yelled at or hit. Even if the dog was not yelled at or hit, the angry body language of the human is clear to the dog, and the dog still learns to feel fear when people arrive. Punishment in these circumstances does not teach the dog anything (except to fear the arrival of people). The dog is completely incapable of associating any punishment with the behavior he performed minutes or hours before.

FACT: Dogs do not eliminate on the floor or destroy items out of spite. The most likely cause of the behavior is anxiety or lack of appropriate exercise and stimulation (or incomplete house-training). Rather than being angry at your dog, seek help from a professional. Your dog may be suffering.



Myth #6

If you use treats to train a dog, you will always need them to get the dog to obey commands.

This is completely untrue. Treats are an excellent means of reinforcing a behavior. Clear and consistent reinforcement is necessary when you initially begin teaching any animal a new behavior. For some animals, a vocal reward, toys, or petting may serve as good reinforcers, but food is for many animals the most salient reinforcement there is. The rules of learning show that when first teaching a new behavior, reinforcing every single time the behavior is performed on cue will lead to the fastest rate of learning. Once a behavior is learned, intermittent reinforcement is the best means of maintaining the behavior and making it most resistant to extinction. This means that you only have to use treats periodically once the behavior is learned.

People who believe that an animal is not responding because it knows there is no treat available have usually failed to use reinforcement appropriately or don't realize that the animal has actually not learned the behavior. (It's actually very common for pet owners to think that a pet has learned a command long before it actually has.)



FACT: When used correctly, positive reinforcement training with food rewards is far more likely to be effective and has less chance of doing harm than most other forms of training.

Myth #7

Dogs chase their tails or spin in circles because they're bored.

Repetitive behaviors such as pacing, spinning, tail chasing, and foot licking have many causes. To infer they are caused by boredom oversimplifies a complicated problem. These behaviors may be caused by frustration or conflict. They may often be secondary to certain medical problems that cause itching, pain, or discomfort in a body part. Sometimes they are caused by seizures, and in other cases they result from other forms of brain dysfunction.

FACT: Repetitive behaviors are complex problems that require evaluation, diagnosis, and treatment by a veterinarian.



Myth #8

Dogs need punishment to learn proper behavior.

Punishment should never be used as the first or only method of dealing with an unwanted behavior. Punishment can cause far more problems than it solves, especially if applied incorrectly or used on a dog with fear- or anxiety-related problems. It is extremely difficult for most people to use punishment effectively, since punishment is only effective if administered within one or two seconds of the unwanted behavior and is administered every time the behavior is performed. Inappropriately used punishment can severely damage your relationship with your pet and worsen many behavior problems.

FACT: It is easier and more effective to teach your dog what behaviors you want it to perform and reward it for those behaviors than it is to punish your dog for unwanted behaviors.



10 situations to avoid if your dog is dominantly aggressive

1 If your dog barks, growls, or ignores you, try to shift its attention to an exercise or a task it knows well. If this doesn't help, walk away from the dog, or sequester it in another room. Banishment and withdrawal of attention are the most potent forms of correction because they remove a dog's ability to control the situation. Dominantly aggressive dogs are usually anxious and rely on interacting with and manipulating people to reassure themselves. Removing these options can help prevent misbehavior.

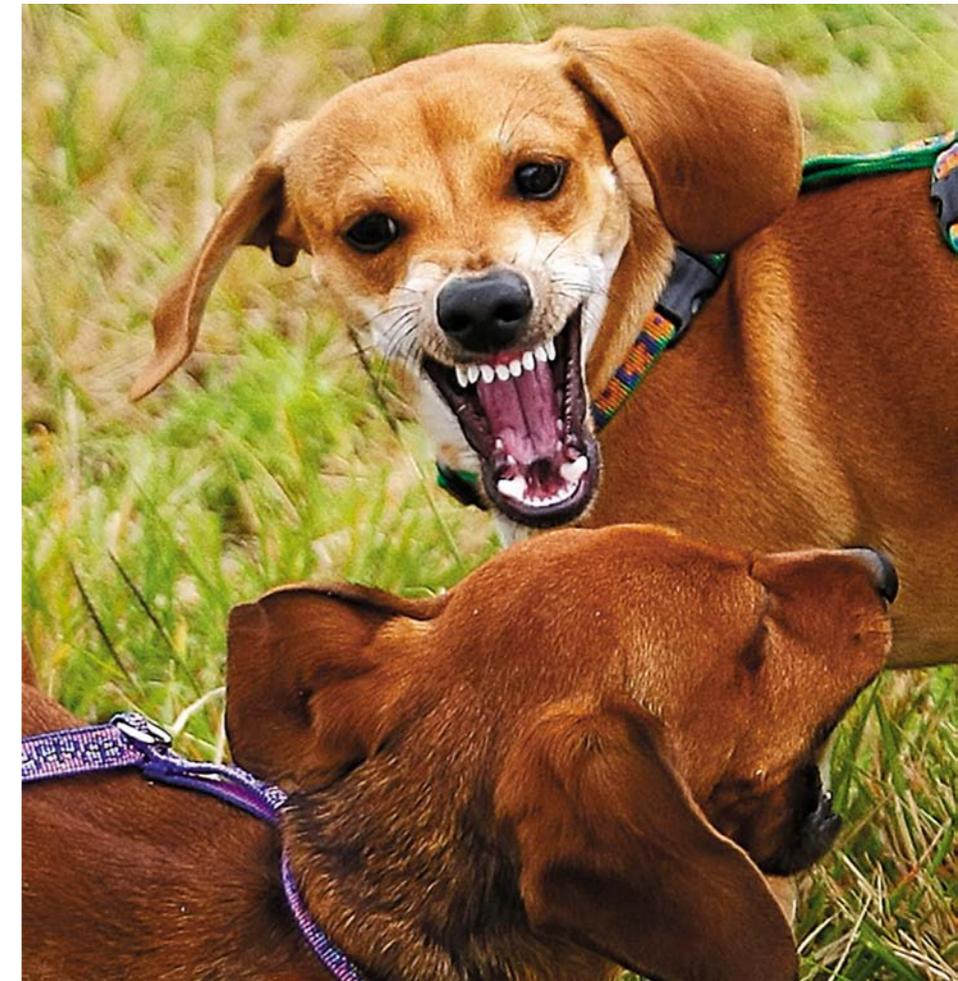
2 Don't abruptly reach for your dog or its collar or pull the dog's legs. First have the dog sit and stay. Then leash the dog or, preferably, use a Gentle Leader® Headcollar (Premier Pet Products, Richmond, Va.). Head collars allow you to safely control a dog. When fitted correctly and used properly, the head collar allows you to gently but firmly close a dog's mouth if the dog becomes aggressive and keep it closed until the dog calms down. This keeps you safe and stops the dog from becoming more aggressive. If wear-

ing a head collar makes your dog more aggressive, the dog is not ready for one. Instead, use a lasso-type leash to take the dog for walks. Never jerk a collar or leash or use it in a forceful manner.

3 Don't disturb your dog when it's resting, sleeping, or lying in front of a door or on the sofa or bed. Don't step over the dog. Always ask your dog to come to you and then to sit and stay. Don't shove the dog off a sofa or bed or push it away if it paws at you. Always tell your dog your intentions and then ask the dog to come and sit and stay for any attention.

4 If your dog scratches you or jumps on you or others, don't push it down. Instead, fold your arms, and turn away. If the dog then spontaneously sits, praise it.

5 If necessary, place a head collar on your dog for walks. Warn your neighbors that it isn't a muzzle but that your dog is undergoing behavior modification.



6 Don't play aggressively with your dog (slapping or wrestling with it). Play only with toys. Play tug of war with a soft sock toy only on the following conditions.

Start the game with your dog sitting, and ask the dog to take the toy. The dog should take the toy only on command and relinquish it when requested. Don't fling the dog around the room on the toy. Finally, you must always win the game: The dog must sit and give you the toy. If you can't meet these conditions, don't play tug of war with your dog.

7 Don't let your dog sleep on the bed, especially if your dog reacts aggressively when disturbed there. You might even have the dog sleep outside the bedroom. This will minimize the potential for an inadvertent threat when you are sleepy and least able to anticipate problem behavior.

8 If your dog is aggressive when fed, feed it in a separate room with the door closed. If you have children, lock the door. If you allow table scraps, place them in the dog's dish. Don't allow the dog to beg at the table. The dog must sit and wait at all times before approaching its dish.

9 Never physically punish your dog. If it growls or lunges, softly tell it "no," and disrupt the situation. Use a word and tone that the dog associates with a less desirable behavior but not as a threat. People who have yelled at the dog a lot in the past may not be able to shout "no" without provoking the dog. Watch your dog to see what elicits

the best response. You can disrupt a bad situation by asking the dog to come into another room and sit or by leaving the dog. If the dog is wearing a head collar, pull the collar shut gently and say "no," and then quickly lead the dog away from the inciting event. If it's necessary to remove the dog from the room or from a situation, wait for the dog to become calm, then practice a few sitting and staying exercises, and emphasize relaxation. If the dog is too reactive, avoid it until it's calm.

10 Warn your friends and neighbors that any aggressive dog is potentially dangerous. When people visit, leave your dog in another room. If you wish to introduce the dog, wait until the gathering has quieted down, and make sure the dog is wearing a head collar. If the dog mingles successfully (sits or rests quietly), praise it. If the dog cannot wear a head collar and walk around quietly, don't allow it to mingle.



*Information provided by:
Karen L. Overall, MS, VMD, PhD, Dipl.ACVB
Department of Clinical Studies
School of Veterinary Medicine
University of Pennsylvania*