

PROBLEM BEHAVIOUR

PREVENTING & REDUCING DOG BEHAVIOUR PROBLEMS



UNDERSTANDING CANINE BEHAVIOR

Understanding your dog's behaviour will help you prevent and reduce behaviour problems.

Not sure what your dog's behaviour is telling you

This can lead to misunderstandings. Like when we think 'he's mad at me, that's why he pees inside or gets in the garbage'. These could just be he had to go pee or there was something yummy in the garbage.

Learn the basics of dog behaviour

Many of the behaviors we label as “problems” are dogs doing normal dog things. Dogs chew, dig, bark, nip at heels, play bite, guard their food and jump up to greet.

Once you know the behaviour basics

Observe, interpret and respond appropriately. This will help you to see the world from your dog's point of view. You can then provide legal outlets for some of his natural dog behaviors.

Understand needs of dogs

Dogs need food, exercise, interacting with people and other animals. We need to understand our dog's daily needs and try to help them meet those needs. By doing this we will have a better understanding of dog behaviour and how to change it if needed.

CHANGING BEHAVIOUR

Understanding a dog's behaviour and needs, we then can prevent and change some problem behaviour.

3 Must-dos to maintain, reduce or change behaviour

1. Exercise and mental stimulation
2. Management
3. Training -using positive reinforcement methods

1) Exercise and Mental Stimulation

Dogs need daily exercise and mental stimulation. Even with physical exercise, your dog will need to use his brain. Imagine if you only went for short walks every day and never had a chance to work, play a sport, read a book or solve a puzzle.

Not getting enough exercise and mental stimulation is the root of many behaviour problems.

Behaviour problem or prevention of problem

Ask yourself is my dog is getting what he needs for daily exercise and mental stimulation?

Exercise

All dogs need exercise, no matter how big or small. Different breeds of dogs need different amounts of exercise but they all need to run and play every day. One or two short walks for a bathroom break is not enough. Leaving a dog in a back yard is not enough. If you're not sure how much exercise your dog needs talk to your vet.

Activities that are fun, great exercise and burn energy

| | | |
|--------|----------------|----------------------|
| Hiking | Jogging | Fetch |
| Tug | Off Leash play | Play with other dogs |

Mental stimulation

Imagine only going for a ten-minute walk every day and then staying inside. For dogs this is not enough and not kind. They need exercise and things that stimulate their brain.

Scavengers

Dogs are natural scavengers. They are hard-wired to search for their food. Feed meals from work to eat toys instead of from a bowl. Or scatter their food in the grass and allow them to search for it. This will tap into their inner scavenger and is a great way to burn off energy.

Noses

Dogs see the world through their noses much like humans do with our eyes. Scent is incredibly important to dogs. Allow plenty of sniff time when on walks. This is an excellent way to provide mental stimulation.

Other ways to provide mental stimulation

- Find-it games
- Nose work
- Use mealtimes to teach new tricks

2) Management

Managing a puppy or new dog is important for reducing and preventing behaviour problems. Start with is the behaviour you're seeing normal or not? If it's normal, like chewing, but not safe because he's chewing wires then how do you keep him safe? Keeping him safe could mean something simple like a dog-proof room or a crate. Once you decide how to keep him safe and you know he needs to chew then decide what to he can chew. You can give your dog a legal outlet or way of doing that normal behaviour.

Dog-proof room

Never give a puppy or a newly adopted dog free-run of the house. You do not want them to learn that your couch is a great chew item and your carpet is the perfect spot to pee. Instead dog-proof a room, use a crate or an ex-pen where they can stay when you're not home.

Set-up dog-proof room dog

- bed
- water
- lots of chew toys
- anything you think they will chew like wires put away
- safe room for your puppy/dog to stay when you're not home

Other management strategies a dog-proof room will help with are housetraining and chewing.

Management strategies for puppies and new dogs

Housetraining

If your dog needs housetraining, teach him to love a crate, and use one to speed up the process. They can have more freedom once you are sure that they are housetrained.

Chewing

Some dogs love to chew. Dogs do not chew shoes out of spite, they chew them because it feels good and is fun to do. Chewing is a way to pass their time. Dogs do not know the difference between a couch leg, your shoe or a dog toy. It is up to us to teach them the difference. Crate train or use a dog proof room.

Getting into the garbage

Scavengers will eat food if it is available. This is why garbage bins are often rooted through. Keep tight lids of the garbage bins and do not leave tempting food on the counter.

Pulling on leash

Dogs pull because they want to get somewhere, not because they want to be first, in charge or the leader.

No-pull equipment is available. Front-end harnesses and head harnesses are safe and kind ways to decrease pulling.

Provide “Legal” Outlets to express their canine needs.

- Feed from work to eat toys to tap into their inner scavenger.
- Dogs are a predatory species. They love to chase moving objects, sniff, grab and shake things and chew things. This is why some dogs try to chase anything that moves: children, bikes, birds, or cars. If your dog is a chaser give him a “legal” outlet for this behavior by playing regular games of fetch.
- Tug is another fantastic game to teach dogs. It taps into their predatory nature and is a great alternative to tugging on the leash or your arm.
- A digging pit will give dogs a legal place to enjoy this activity without ruining the flowerbeds.
- Companionship - play with other dogs or people. Dogs are social animals they crave companionship. Leaving a dog alone in a yard is the ultimate punishment. Backyard dogs often bark out of boredom because there is nothing else for them to do.
- Bring them into the house and include them in daily activities.

3) Training

It is unfair to expect dogs to immediately understand the human world. It is up to us understand them and then teach them how to live in our world. Show them where to go potty, what a chew toy is and how to greet people. Train using force-free humane methods to teach a dog how to navigate the human world.

Training dogs what to do

Rude dogs who jump up on people

The normal greeting behavior of dogs after an absence is to lick the other dog's face. This is why they so often jump up to greet; they are trying to reach your face. Teach them that sitting instead of jumping is the polite way to greet humans.

Train the following key behaviors well and you will have a polite dog who is welcome anywhere:

- 1) Sit
- 2) Leave it
- 3) Wait
- 4) Coming when called
- 5) Down stay

Dogs who guard things from people or other animals

It is completely normal for dogs to guard food, items and locations. This is resource guarding. Not all dogs guard but some do. The dog may growl, lunge or snap when approached while, eating, playing with a toy or laying on the sofa. Do not take this personally, he cannot help it. He just happened to retain this behavior from his wolf ancestry. Teach him that it is fantastic when you approach as this predicts good things. A force-free reward-based trainer will be able to guide you through this. Avoid any verbal or physical harsh correction methods as they can result in a bite.

Understanding dog behaviour means fewer misunderstandings like "he's mad at me, that's why he pees on my bed." or "he jumped on me, because he's dominant". Understanding dog needs and behaviour will not only help with training it also means less disappointment because of unrealistic expectations.

Always use force-free humane training methods.

UNDERSTANDING CANINE EMOTION

Emotions play an important role in how your dog behaves. A dog's emotional state can range from happy and relaxed to anxious or afraid. Destructive behaviour when left alone can be a sign of separation anxiety or boredom. It is important to understand the difference as the treatment for each is different.

When a dog is fearful he may bark lunge or growl in an attempt to get the scary thing to move away. Never punish a dog for giving warning signals. It is the dog's way of telling you he is uncomfortable.

If your dog is anxious or fearful there are ways to make him feel more comfortable. Show him that the thing that frightens him is actually fantastic. Expose him to it gradually and pair it with high value food. It is not always possible to turn a fearful dog into a social butterfly. However with patience and time you can usually see improvement. Your vet and a qualified trainer, who uses humane methods, will be able to help you.

Understand how your behaviour affects your dog

Dogs do what works and they are always learning from you what works and what doesn't. Do you give into him every time he barks for your attention? If yes he is learning that barking works.

We often only notice when our dogs are behaving badly but fail to reward them when they are being good. Reward your dog for doing things that you like. Give him a treat for laying quietly on his bed while you prepare dinner.

Reward your dog for doing things that you like, this will make those behaviors happen more often.

Effective and humane ways to change behavior

The most effective and humane method of training uses positive reinforcement and negative punishment.

Show the dog that you control the good stuff. Good behavior results in a reward (food, walks, a chance to sniff or a ball thrown). Unwanted behavior causes the good stuff to go away.

Sit = ball

No sit = ball goes away

Positive Reinforcement: Good behavior earns a reward. For example, give a treat when dog sits to greet someone at the door. Behaviour of sitting increases in frequency.

Sit = treat =  sits

Negative punishment: Undesired behaviour results in the removal of the good thing. For example, put the ball away for 30 seconds when he barks for you to throw it. Behavior of barking decreases in frequency.

Barking = ball goes away for 30 sec

There is never a need to use pain or fear when training a dog.

If you are find training challenging on your own, sign up for a class or hire a private trainer. Make sure that the methods used are force-free and humane. Never use prong collars, choke chains, shock collars, harsh noises or other aversive tools. These can cause or worsen fear and aggression.

Have fun, fun, fun!

Learning new things should be a fun experience for you and your dog. The BC SPCA recommends force free positive reinforcement training. It is effective and easy to learn for you and your dog.

VETERINARIAN HELP

Training alone may not always be successful if a dog is too fearful and not able to relax and learn. In these cases contact your veterinarian for help.