



How to stop the 10 most common dog obedience problems



*A useful guide for you
and for your pal*

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Introduction

Every dog owner has been down this road before – the head banging futility of trying to teach your dog, whether young or old, how to overcome a particular behaviour problem. Unfortunately, in some cases it can be downright impossible to get through to them and overcome whatever mental blocks and obedience issues they have.

There are a variety of reasons this could be. Your dog may have entirely too much energy, the result of not getting enough exercise. Your dog might be challenging your position as the alpha leader of the household – something that needs to be nipped in the bud immediately to avoid potentially worse problems. Or your dog just may never have been given specific boundaries to follow.

Whatever is causing your dog's obedience problems, know that 99.9% of all dogs are good at heart and capable of learning exactly how to behave. It's only a matter of finding the teaching method that works for them and being consistent in how you approach their issues.

That's why you're reading this; to find out what your dog wants and needs to see and hear from you to avoid the negative impact of these behaviours in your home. So, let's get started and take a look at how you can curb everything from a leaky bladder to flat out aggression.

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1. Potty Issues

When it comes to a dog's bladder, there are many potential problems. It is not always an immediate issue of a dog not *wanting* to go outside – sometimes it is a matter of them not being able to hold it that long or simply not understanding the boundaries between inside and outside.

In reality, the last thing a dog wants to do is go to the bathroom in their home. They are hardwired to go away from their dens, to avoid the impact of disease and parasites that can plague them in the wild. This is one of the primary reasons a dog will hold their urine for so long when you leave the house – they don't want to make a mess in their home.

The real issue comes in when a) the dog doesn't understand that the house is their home and is not trained to tell the difference and b) when the dog is not taken outside often enough to relieve itself. So, the first thing we need to do is determine which category your dog falls into and what the quickest and easiest way to solve the problem is.

Consistency and Small Breeds

Assuming a dog has been at least partially housebroken, the first thing you need to ask yourself is whether the dog is being taken outside often enough. This comes up most commonly with small breeds like pinschers, Yorkshire terriers, dachshunds, or pugs – dogs that have small bladders and minimal insulation. When the weather gets cold or wet, owners will often times minimize the amount of time they submit their dogs to the elements. They figure that allowing their dog to make a small mess inside won't hurt them and it is easy to clean up.

Unfortunately, while a single mess might not seem like a big deal at the time, it can actually cause a number of problems further down the line. To start with, the dog does not *want* to go to the bathroom inside – especially if it has been trained to go outside. It is their home and they are more comfortable going outside. Imagine how comfortable you would be relieving yourself in the kitchen sink instead of in the bathroom.

Secondly, a dog that is allowed to make a mess inside will never learn that the bathroom is outdoors. Dogs do not have a natural inclination to delineate between indoor and outdoor areas. You need to teach them.

Handling Potty Problems

If your dog makes messes on the floor, the easiest thing to do is to start from scratch. Crate training is a very effective tool because it gives the dog a smaller

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space to claim as their own, tapping into that instinctual desire to not make a mess where they sleep. If crate training is out of the question, you should confine the dog to a single room and pay close attention to them. Create a routine that allows the dog to go to the bathroom at the same time every day, and when the dog does their business outdoors, make sure to praise them profusely. On the flip side, do not get angry if your dog makes a mess inside.

Attempt to startle them with a sharp noise, such as clapping your hands, and then take them outside immediately so they begin associating outdoors with relieving themselves. Just remember that punishing your dog for making a mess will have no impact. The dog is incapable of understanding why they are being punished before they fully understand that they are not permitted to go to the bathroom indoors.

Additionally, it is a good idea to have your carpets thoroughly cleaned to remove any pet odor that may linger. Conventional cleaners tend to just mask the smell to human noses. Dogs, on the other hand, can still smell their markings and will return there later. If you have more than one dog, they may even attempt to mark over the top of each other, leading to a cycle that can be hard to break.

2. Aggression Problems

There is nothing more alarming than a dog with aggression problems. Such issues can be a sign of a number of problems. If you adopted your dog as an adult, they may have been poorly treated as a puppy. If you raised the puppy without proper limits, they may be trying to assert dominance over those around them. If the dog is bored or has excess energy they may have developed anxiety or fear issues that need to be assuaged by strong, alpha leadership.

This is a hard one to provide specific advice on, because all dogs are different and each aggressive tendency needs to be handled with special care and specific actions according to the dog and their issues. In many cases, it is a good idea to hire a dog training or behaviour specialist who can help outline a plan to treat your dog's aggression. For general issues, however, here are some tips to get you started.

Pinpointing Sources of Aggression

To start with, you need to determine what is causing your dog's aggressive behaviour. Some people may not catch the patterns until they stop and check it directly. Here are some common aggression issues that you may encounter:

- Food Aggression
- Towards Children

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- Towards other Dogs
- Towards Strangers

Once you've distinguished what is causing the aggression in your dog, it is time to avoid those particular situations as much as possible for the foreseeable future. If your dog is aggressive towards other dogs, don't take them to a dog park until you can determine if the behaviour is curable. The same goes toward children and food. While addressing an aggression issue, it is extremely important to be careful.

Positive Reinforcement

The majority of training regiments will include positive reinforcement – the process of providing treats and praise to a dog when they act as you want them to act. One common way to do this is to have your dog on a leash and stand far away from the source of aggression. Give your dog treats and praise and then move closer to the source of aggression. They will eventually start to see that source of aggression as a source of reward and get excited rather than angry when they see it.

The important thing to remember here is that your dog will not react well to negative reinforcement. Punishment will escalate and can result in aggression or violence. You might even cause your dog to bite, as most aggression is a result of fear and anxiety – violence and anger only heighten that fear. Additionally, never punish a dog for growling. That growling is scary, but it is a warning sign of discomfort. If you remove it, your dog may simply bite instead without the warning needed to remove them from the situation.

Food Aggression – If your dog shows signs of food aggression, there are a few things you should do. To start with, never punish the dog for that aggression. Instead, you need to retrain them to think differently. This starts by setting up a feeding schedule. Stop filling the bowl at all times, and start feeding them only 2-3 times a day with the same amount of food. By becoming the source of the food, they look to you for the food rather than attempting to protect what they feel is theirs. Additionally, you can try feeding your dog in a different room to remove the sense of ownership over that location, and you should always remove any other dogs from the room and feed them separately if necessary.

Aggression with Other Dogs – Another common source of aggression is towards other dogs. If you have another dog in your home, this can be resolved by going on a walk together and letting them get to know each other on leashes. If the dogs have been around each other for some time, it can be a sign that your dogs do not have a clear leader in their pack and are fighting with each other for that role. When this happens, you need to step up and take the alpha leadership position. Often times,

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simply by showing clear leadership, you can negate any negative behaviours in the dogs of your home towards each other.

Avoid Rewarding the Behaviour – The number one thing that all dog owners need to remember is that aggression is not acceptable and cannot be allowed. If your dog snaps at someone, don't pet them afterwards or try to be reassuring. It will only reinstall the behaviour. Don't punish them either as it can be confusing and create worse situations. Your goal should be to address correcting the behaviour, not directly reacting to it.

As you can see, there are many ways a dog might exhibit aggressive behaviour and many ways to stall or eliminate that behaviour. The one constant among it all is the need of the owner to be consistent in their actions and to provide strong, alpha leadership for the dog. Training your dog through obedience training is another important step as well.

If Things Go Too Far

Don't forget that there are options to help you control your dog while training them. To start with, see a vet to ensure your dog is in good health and their aggression is not a medical problem. Second, obtain restrictive leashes or muzzles if they are necessary in public. Finally, stop making a big deal about certain things like when another dog approaches or when strangers are nearby. Your dog feeds on that anxiety and will react accordingly, especially on a leash. It all starts with powerful, strong leadership from the owner. If you can provide that, your dog's aggressive tendencies will be much easier to deal with.

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3. Digging

Digging is one of many natural behaviours that dogs would perform in the wild. In this case, it is important because they will dig up den space for their pups and to hide food from other predators. So, when a dog digs, it is because of a deep seeded need to do so. Most often, they enjoy it and at times, they can become obsessive. Digging itself is not harmful to your dog – in some cases it can be therapeutic for them, if properly channelled.

Unfortunately, whether your dog is getting a great deal of enjoyment out of their digging or not, they are likely destroying your flower garden or your backyard in the process. So, you'll want to find a good balance that will minimize the digging behaviour without stifling your dog's desire to play and use up energy.

The Root of Digging

The first thing to do is determine why your dog is digging. In many cases, digging is a result of excess energy and boredom – a messy combination in many dog breeds. Common family dog breeds like Labradors and Retrievers will often be full of excess energy. If they are not walked and played with often enough or if they are locked up in the backyard without anyone to keep them busy, they may turn to digging as an outlet for that excess energy. Dogs don't watch TV or read books when they're bored – they tend to destroy things, channelling their instincts into something *they* enjoy.

Breaking the Habit

So, before attempting to change your dog's behaviour, first spend some time determining what you can do to minimize the causes. Find more time to walk your dog, spend some time in the backyard exercising with them, and make sure you are attending their needs at all times. If you toss your dog in the backyard all day and leave them be, don't expect to find a pristine lawn when you return.

To start, protect any areas you don't want dug up. You can cover the areas that your dog likes to dig with something they cannot dig through – like rocks or tarps. Your dog wants soft dirt to dig up, so if you can minimize the areas that they have access to, you'll be able to cut them off easier. Another good trick is to sprinkle natural dog repellents like red pepper flakes, pennyroyal oil, or citronella – all easily available.

Finally, you need to give your dog something solid to think about other than the destructive behaviours they have picked up. For many high energy dogs, simple training or obedience school can help with this. Because you're giving your dog commands they need to think about, you are replacing the urges and desires they have to dig with constructive actions that you can control.

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Finally, if you really must leave your dog in a place where they can dig excessively, provide them with a toy or an alternative way to burn off that excess energy. Toys, bones, or a second dog with which to play are all good ways to reduce the un-channelled energy that gets unleashed on your poor peonies.

Creating a Special Digging Space

Another trick that works well for many dog owners is to provide the dog with a dedicated digging area that they are allowed to play in. Take a kiddie pool and fill it in with dirt, possibly even with dog treats buried in the dirt. Then, when the dog wants to dig, let them dig there. If you find them digging in your lawn at all, simply clap your hands and attract their attention. By doing this, you can claim the backyard as your space and tell your dog that they are not permitted to dig in it, but that they have their own space in the kiddie pool.

4. Barking

Every dog barks occasionally – whether to exhibit excitement or to tell you they are bored. The problem is that some dogs get carried away and do not stop barking. They grow agitated at any sound they hear inside or outside the home or they simply bark for the sake of barking. In these cases, an owner will quickly grow impatient, as will their neighbours. So it is important to take action sooner than later, communicating to your dog that barking is not permitted for the sake of barking.

Why Your Dog Barks

To start with, know that your dog is likely bred to bark. Almost all breeds were bred to make noise in some form or another. Hunting dogs and terriers barked to alert their masters to the fact that they found something. Herding dogs were bred to bark and nip at the animals they were herding. Even some working dogs were bred to become vocal when necessary. And of course, dogs bark naturally as a sign of excitement or aggression. I could outline what all of our dog's barks mean, but you likely have a good idea based on the tone and body language of the animal – they are just communicating.

Minimizing Barking

The real goal then, rather than stopping your dog from barking completely, is to minimize that barking. There are very few situations in which your dog should bark endlessly, even when communicating to you. But, at the same time, you want your dog to be able to warn you if there is danger, communicate when it needs to go outside, and keep other animals away if it is uncomfortable or afraid.

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- **Exercise** – To start with, make sure your dog gets the exercise it needs to release any pent up energy that could be leading to excess barking. Often times, barking can be the result of boredom or anxiety – exercise will help to reduce that.
- **Don't Reinforce the Behaviour** – The number one reason dogs continue to bark, after energy level problems, is simply that their owners reinforce the behaviour. They feel bad for the dog when they whine or simply want them to stop barking when they are angry. So, they give them attention, give them their food, or take them outside. Your goal should be to never give your dog what they want when they bark. If you need to wait them out, do it – giving them what they want when they bark at you will only teach them to continue doing it.
- **Anger and Shouting Causes Confusion** – Yelling at your dog or getting angry will only cause confusion. As with most behaviour, they don't know they're doing something wrong, and they will only get confused if you start yelling at them. Along these same lines, avoid any punishment laden treatments like shock collars. They are inhumane and most dogs will try to learn how to get around them.
- **Training** – Simple training can be very helpful in minimizing barking behaviour in your dog. Teach them to sit, lie down, or shake as well as to speak and be quiet. These simple commands cause them to shift focus to you and away from whatever they are barking about. Additionally, teaching them to bark and stop barking on command gives you more control over their vocal habits.
- **Controlling their Outdoor Behaviours** – If your dog barks continuously outside, they will never learn to stop inside. Rather than yelling from the back window, go outside, attract their attention and divert it whenever they bark. Your goal should be to teach them that there are other ways to communicate with you and that their focus should be on you and your home, not whatever is beyond your fence.

Barking is one of the harder things to control in a dog, largely because of how natural it is for them to do it. However, with proper training, exercise, and attention to what might be causing your dog's outspoken behaviour, that barking can be severely reduced or even stopped.

As a side note, for those considering extreme measures like de-barking surgery, please think twice. The surgery does not actually stop the barking behaviour – it just quiets it. Additionally, it is unsafe to ever put an animal under anaesthesia and into surgery, and to do it for cosmetic reasons is unnecessary. If your dog is barking so

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much that you're considering a surgery, the odds are that they have a greater, deeper lying fear or anxiety issue that needs to be dealt with anyway. A veterinarian, behaviourist, or dog trainer can all be more helpful in addressing your concerns than a medical procedure.

5. Chewing

Chewing is another of many built in instinctual actions that a dog can get caught up in. For many dog breeds, chewing begins as a puppy, when teething and excess energy get channelled into chewing everything in sight. This is not abnormal, and while it is important to teach a dog otherwise from a young age, you also need to take precautions, puppy-proofing your home to avoid unnecessary damage.

As your dog gets older though, chewing can move beyond youthful indiscretion and into the territory of serious behavioural problem – one that needs to be addressed with specific actions and careful training.

Why Do Dogs Chew?

Chewing occurs for a number of reasons, but you should know that it will happen no matter what you do. Your goal should be to direct it toward the right mediums and to minimize it where it can cause destruction. Even then, some dogs may just be psychologically wired to chew more than others. That is when you'll need to make adjustments to their environment to reduce what they have access to.

Retraining a Dog's Instinct to Chew

First, know that most dogs learn their chewing behaviours as puppies. When teething, they seek out anything in sight to chew on. Owners who give them old socks, shoes, or toys from the house are basically telling them that those items are okay. If your adult dog is constantly raiding your closet for shoes or old t-shirts, try to remember if you did this when they were young.

Even if you did not give your puppy household items to chew on, you'll need to retrain them to understand that those items are *not* okay to chew on. Simply yelling at the dog will almost never have a positive impact. They are doing something natural and until you show them that your belongings are not okay to chew on, the behaviour will not stop.

To start, you may consider crate training your dog. By removing the dog from an environment as large as your home, you can control what they do when you're not home. To that end, when you are at home, make sure you have a chewing substitute to hand them when they start chewing on a shoe, or a cushion, or whatever else in

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your home they gravitate towards. A rawhide is often a good substitute if they like leather, fabric, or suede. Some dogs are partial toward rawhide, however, so you may want to take them to the pet store with you and have them choose a chew toy from the racks there.

Deterrents from Chewing

If your dog continuously finds new things to chew around your home, there are other pro-active ways to stop the chewing behaviour. To start with, there are sprays sold by most pet stores that are unpleasant to a dog when they chew. Bitter apple spray works for many dogs, as does cayenne pepper spray. Make sure to get something organic and non-chemically laden. It should be humane, and just taste bad. You don't want it to cause physical pain.

This kind of deterrent is especially useful for a dog that has a habit of chewing on carpets or cushions and clothing. Additionally, you should teach your dog to "leave it". This common command forces your dog to drop what they are doing immediately, as you take control of the item. It is an alpha leadership command that is very important for a dog when you take them out of the house. The last thing you want is a dog with a home bone or a dead animal in its mouth that will not drop it. The "leave it" command can be taught with treats or a clicker, and a whole lot of patience.

Potential Health Concerns

Something to keep in mind when your dog chews chronically is that there are certain health conditions that lead a dog to chew on things like plastic or rubber, or to swallow items whole in place of palatable food. This isn't just a dog acting out. This is an issue that should be addressed by your vet as it can lead to poisoning or intestinal blockage. If your dog eats a coin or a rubber band once, you may be able to chalk it up as an accident. If it occurs repeatedly and cannot be curbed with sprays or training, see a vet to learn what options you have.

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6. Jumping

Dogs love to jump on things. It is a way of showing their excitement coming to meet someone, and ultimately purging excess energy that they tend to build up. However, it can be dangerous, especially if your dog is big or if there are small children or elderly people around. The last thing you want is your dog knocking over your grandmother and breaking a hip or taking down a neighbour's child on accident while trying to play.

Why Dogs Jump

In their world, jumping is a sign of endearment and a way to parlay excitement when someone returns. Puppies will jump up on their mothers when they are young and the mother returns, and as a result, that behaviour translates to greeting an owner or a new person to the house that excites them. In some cases dogs will also jump up to exert dominance over another dog or another person. If you've ever seen a dog jump onto the back of another dog's neck, this is what they are doing – showing that dog that they are superior.

Stopping the Jumping

Jumping can be stopped in a number of ways. However, many people don't utilise the proper techniques, instead giving their dogs attention they don't need and reinforcing that jumping behaviour. Think of it this way. If your dog were able to talk, they'd be saying "look at me! Pet me! Play with me!" when they jump on you. If you look at them and give them attention, you're doing exactly what they want, effectively rewarding the bad behaviour.

So, things like grabbing their paws or pushing them away – while they are effective immediately – will not work in the long run. They'll simply do it again, knowing that additional attention is incoming. When it comes to yelling or showing anger, you'll only confuse your dog and in some cases, and create potentially dangerous situations when a dog doesn't know how to greet a stranger to the home.

Properly Ignoring Your Dog

Like many attention seeking behaviours, jumping can be dealt with best by simply ignoring the dog. Turn away from them and continue about your business. You should not make eye contact, talk to, or touch your dog for the first few minutes you enter the door. This can be very hard to do, and if you have a family, you'll need to lay down strict rules about how to greet the animal, avoiding that anxious, jumping

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behaviour. For many dogs, that early attention can even breed separation anxiety – causing them to react when you leave or come home.

Of course, you don't need to ignore your dog forever – just until they relax and stop moving. They might stand patiently waiting, or if they are well trained, they could sit or lay down waiting for your attention. Once they've give you their calm attention, you can reward them softly. Don't get them excited again, but offer them a bit of attention and even a treat if you have any. The goal here is to teach them that your attention will only come when they are calm and patiently waiting for you.

7. Bolting Out the Front Door

One of the scariest things any dog owner can experience is their dog getting out the front door without a leash on and attempting to run away. Yet, many dog owners struggle daily with animals that attempt to do just that. And because dogs are not like cats and have no desire to go anywhere without us, why do they so eagerly burst through the front door whenever it is opened? It is important to not only understand why they do it, but specifically how to stop it to keep your dog safe and to maintain your peace of mind.

Why Dogs Run out the Door

Dogs run out the door because they don't understand the danger out there. When that door opens, they smell a whole new world – one reminiscent of walks and other animals and a whole number of ways to have fun. It is impossible to tell your dog that if they go out there, they'll be subject to cars, other animals, your neighbours, and any number of other possible problems that could cause them harm. And, once a dog has escaped out the door the first time, they'll try repeatedly to do it again – hoping to get that taste of freedom once more.

Setting Household Rules

Before you do anything else, you need to establish clearly stated household rules that will keep your dog from running out the door before you can properly train him. First, make sure anyone living in the house knows not to open that door until they know where the dog is and that they are safely beyond range of getting in or out. If someone must hold the dog until it is possible to safely get in or out, do so.

Second, make sure to communicate these rules to visitors. Other dog owners without this problem will often assume the dog won't attempt an escape while non-dog owners simply don't think about it.

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Training Your Dog to Stay Indoors

Of course, no one wants to spend the next 10 years playing footsie with your dog at the door to keep them from running into the street. So, while the above rules are important and should be established immediately, you should also start training your dog to stay clear of the door and stop attempting his daring escapes.

Start with the basic commands – sit, stay, and down. These commands are incredibly important for getting and holding your dog's attention long enough to maintain their position in a single place without running out the door. It will not solve the problem immediately, but to even start the training process, they need to know these commands. As you progress, you'll be teaching your dog that the door is your territory and that it cannot go near without your specific permission.

Maintaining Position

While teaching a dog to sit and stay is important, it should go a little further when taking control of the door. Here are some tips to follow:

1. **Introduce a Hand Signal** – Along with the “Sit” verbal command, teach your dog to obey a hand signal, such as an upheld hand, like a crossing guard.
2. **Creating Distance** – Choose a line beyond which you don't want your dog going when you open the door. Have them sit and stay there and then walk toward the door. If they get up at any time, have them sit again before moving.
3. **Holding the Position** – If your dog comes toward the door at all, do not simply have them sit again. Return them to the original position and start from scratch. They need to learn that there is a barrier that they cannot cross and you need to hold steady to it.
4. **Practice** – You will need to practice this command repeatedly and enforce it whenever the door is opened. It can be distracting to make guests wait when training your dog, but it is important to teach the dog that they need to wait patiently away from the door whenever it is opened.

Make sure, when you are practicing to reward your dog that they perform the action correctly. If they move forward at all, start over again. But, if you can get to the door, turn the knob and open the door without them reacting, reward them for following your commands.

8. Pulling on the Lead

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Walking your dog should be a relaxing, enjoyable experience – for both of you. Yet, for millions of dog owners, a walk can be one of the most stressful experiences of the day. An overanxious dog that pulls on the leash or refuses to listen while out of the house can lead to shortened walks (and less exercise for a hyperactive animal), and ultimately a less enjoyable experience with your pet on a daily basis. Luckily, there are a few simple things you can do to alleviate that constant pulling.

The Walking Relationship

A dog has an instinctual desire to push back when you push on their chest. By wrapping a collar or harness around them and attaching a leash, you are putting pressure on them that they return in kind. It's an instinctual reaction and it isn't abnormal. But, it can make walking your dog a painful experience. To avoid this from happening, you need to keep your dog from putting that pressure on the leash. The more pressure they create, the harder they end up pulling.

As the owner and the holder of the leash, your control over the walking experience is absolute – or it should be. The walk begins the second you pick up the leash, the moment your dog realizes that they are about to go for a walk. The training to control a pulling dog must begin at this exact moment – reigning in all that excess energy before it can be transferred into pulling your arm out of its socket.

Starting the Walk

When you start the walk ritual, always have your dog sit and stay first. You need to put them into a calm-submissive state where their energy is being directed into following your commands. Remember, something as simple as 'sit' and 'stay' takes a serious amount of mental energy and concentration from a dog – especially when they are that excited. By channelling that energy, you can eliminate the bouncing around that they perform before taking them out. What is important here is that you put the leash away if they exhibit excitement and jumping. Don't reward the behaviour.

Once you've attached the leash, make sure the dog awaits your command entirely. They should not move toward the door or try to pull you in any way until you've given them leave to do so. You should be able to make it to the door without the leash pulling tight. The second the dog begins to pull, return to the original position and start over again. It can take time to teach a dog that they cannot pull excitedly, but if you return to that position over and over again, they will get it eventually. Excitement won't get them out the door. The same goes for opening the door. Do it slowly and calmly and stop if the dog starts to get too excited.

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You should never have to punish your dog. After all, you have the one thing in the world they want most – a walk. By withholding that, you have a powerful reward for them when they finally follow your commands correctly.

Walking Your Dog

Once you finally reach the sidewalk, it is extremely important that you follow the same steps from before. In some cases, it requires that you exhibit even more patience than your dog, but if you're serious about maintaining the discipline of the walk without being pulled on, you need to make sure the dog doesn't get rewarded for pulling. Bring a bag of treats with you (or a clicker if you're using that as a training tool) and whenever your dog properly walks forward at your side with a slack leash, reward them.

If the dog pulls too hard or starts going in front of you, calmly take a few steps backward and make them sit and stay until you are comfortable moving forward again. Always pull gently on the leash to return to the original positions. Never do anything in anger or put too much force on the leash or the dog can misinterpret your actions and pull even harder.

It may seem a little abstract, but the goal here is to teach the dog that when the collar goes tight on their neck, they stop moving. Your voice will not be nearly as effective as that single, sharp physical sensation. It takes longer than many other training exercises, but eventually, your dog will learn that they don't get to move forward with their walk until the leash is slack. This forces them to walk beside you without pulling and hopefully without too much excitement.

9. Whining

A dog that whines can be very hard to deal with. The exact causes of the whining are often hard to pinpoint as it is not quite barking, nor is it quite an anxious act. It is simply whining and it can be related to excess energy, separation anxiety, or a desire to reach something they cannot get to. Because the source of whining is hard to pinpoint, it can be hard to stop the behaviour, but with these tips it should be easier to narrow down what you need to do and react to it.

Why Do Dogs Whine?

A dog's whine is very different than a bark, and often times can be harder to stop. It generally means they are in pain or scared, but in many cases it can relate to their being upset about something – often times the result of anxiety.

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In domesticated dogs, who are rarely in pain because they are safe indoors, a whine is often a symptom of feeling abandoned by their pack or upset about something in their home. This whine is their way of alarming you to their condition so that you can come and rescue them. Your goal, however, should be to train them to avoid that anxiety.

As a side note, if your dog never whines or starts whining when nothing apparent is wrong, it very well might be a symptom of pain or illness. If this happens, you should see a vet immediately to have your dog checked out.

Anxiety Related Whining

When a dog whines because of separation, it is important to teach your dog how to accept your absence. If not, that simple whining can advance to damaging and noisy anxiety driven behaviours. In extreme cases, an anxious dog can destroy your furniture or make messes on the floor when you leave the house. Here are some tips to reduce whining before it becomes full-blown separation anxiety:

1. **Choose Your Dog's Den** – Many people will give the dog the whole house as their territory. This is fine if your dog is well behaved and doesn't have any problems when you leave. But, if anxiety is an issue, you'll want to consider relegating a single room or a crate for the dog to inhabit when you leave. By having their own space that they can go to as their "safe spot", they will feel more comfortable when you leave.
2. **Learning to Ignore the Dog at Key Times** – Another issue that can create whining in a dog is giving it too much attention before leaving and when returning. There are two things at play here. When leaving, if you give too much attention, they will feel that separation immediately. When returning home, you will be rewarding whatever anxious behaviours they exhibited when you were gone, teaching them that whining worked to bring you back.
3. **Teaching them to Be Comfortable** – To teach your dog how to be comfortable when you leave, you need to practice doing it while still in the house. With crate training, this can be done simply by putting the dog in a crate and leaving the room. If you place your dog in a separate room, the same applies. In many cases, you will need to listen to them whine for a while, but it is important that you don't return to the room before they stop whining. It will only reinforce the behaviour.

Not all whining is anxiety related unfortunately. In some cases, it may be just to get attention when you're in the house already. In some cases, this can be a side effect of them having too much nervous energy and not getting enough exercise. In other cases, it may be the result of them trying to get additional attention. In such cases, it

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is always best to ignore them than to react. If the behaviour continues, it could be a sign that you don't have full control of the household and need to do some additional training to assert alpha leadership.

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10. Separation Anxiety

A dog is a very social animal. They live and die in the wild with their pack. In your home, you are their fellow pack members and that means, when they are left alone as you go to work or run errands, they grow anxious and worried that you may not come back. However, just because a dog is anxious that you are leaving does not mean that they should react so strongly. From barking and whining to destructive behaviours like chewing, digging, and tearing, a dog with separation anxiety can be very hard to deal with.

The Root of Anxiety

In the wild, a dog lives and dies through the pack around them. So, it is natural that they see you and your family as their pack. However, in some cases, a dog may start to panic at the thought of being left alone. They feel as though they are being abandoned, and their survival instincts go a little haywire, causing them to bark, make messes, and even tear things apart as they lose general control of their faculties. When you return home, they might be frantic and unable to control themselves. At first, it might seem like they are very loving, but the messes, destroyed property, and angry calls from neighbours can be stressful for even the most dedicated dog owner.

Avoiding Separation Anxiety

To start with, you need to rule out the possibility that your dog is just bored. A dog that doesn't get enough attention or exercise will often behave in the same way – barking, destroying things, and overreacting when you return home. However, boredom is much easier to fix. It just requires a bit of extra attention and exercise for your dog. Give them some extra walks, a few toys, and train them with some basic tricks to avoid destruction at unwanted times.

When it comes to anxiety, your dog's first symptoms will key in on your actions. They can tell when you're about to leave by how you put on your shoes, grab your coat, or pick up your keys. In extreme cases, they will know you're leaving as soon as you wake up, turning them into an utter mess before you even get to the door. To adjust for this, change your routine. Sit down randomly, put on your coat at different times, change when you feed the dog. The less regular your routines, the harder it is for the dog to associate them with leaving and the lesser that anxiety will be when you leave.

Solving Existing Anxiety Issues

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For many people, anxiety is something that already exists, but it can be resolved before it becomes too destructive. Here are some important tips to help reduce or stop anxiety issues early:

- **Leaving and Returning Home** – When you leave and return home, it is *vital* that you don't give your dog too much attention. It can be hard, especially with a new puppy, but that extra attention only highlights for them the fact that you are leaving or were gone. For moderate anxiety, simply ignoring your dog for a few minutes before you leave and after you return home will reduce their anxiety greatly. For severe cases, other steps will be needed.
- **Controlling How Long You Are Gone** – This is a very complex process and can be hard for anyone that has a regular job and no one else to leave at home. But, it does work well so if your dog's case is severe enough, consider finding a way to do it. The goal here is to start by leaving your dog for very short periods of time – only 1-2 minutes or even less if your dog is extremely anxious. Your goal here should be to only go outside long enough to show your dog you will return, before their anxiety builds. Don't give the dog attention when you return. Just keep everything quiet and wait for your dog to relax. Then, step back outside again and do it all over. Over the course of days, or even weeks, you will increase the time between these sessions, stepping outside for 5 minutes, then 10, then 20, and up to an hour or longer, until you can leave for an entire day and not worry about anxiety.
- **Consistency** – By far the most important thing for a dog with anxiety is to be consistent with how you handle it. If there are multiple people in the household, they all must ignore the dog when returning and leaving. You must maintain the behaviours over time to make them stick.

If things don't click right away, it can take a little time to advance. However, if extreme cases of anxiety persist, you may want to consider talking to a behaviourist or even a vet. There are advanced solutions to this problem, but only if all training attempts are unsuccessful.

Conclusion

Your dog is a good dog – however they may act right now. They just need to be given the tools and the support from their owner needed to overcome unwanted behaviours. That's where you come in. As the owner and de facto pack leader of your home, it is your duty to give your dog structure, providing them with the rules to live by that all animals need.

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By giving your dog that leadership, as well as stimulating them intellectually and wearing them out physically, you will be surprised by just how many behaviours on this list will slowly (or not so slowly) disappear for good.

But, even if the behaviours don't disappear overnight, it is important to be persistent and consistent. Your dog may not learn immediately, but when it finally sinks in and they understand that they cannot chew on your TV remote or pee in the front hallway, they will likely remember that for the rest of their lives, striving on a daily basis to make their owner happy and to follow the boundaries you have set for them.

It all starts with you and a desire to have a happier, more wholesome relationship with your dog. If you're ready, you can bet your canine friend is as well.

Recommended Reading

Canis Clicker Training Academy

By Morten Egtvedt and Cecilie Koeste

<http://www.germanshepherd-training.net/go/clicker>

Imagine not only putting a stop to all dog behavioral problems for good (digging, barking, aggression, jumping, chewing and so forth), but also being able to train your dog to perform impressive tricks like begging on command, climbing ladders and more!

The great thing about clickers is that it can take as little as 15 minutes to teach your dog that a click is a good thing and even less time to start teaching them basic commands with a clicker.

Additionally, a clicker is much more consistent than your voice. It doesn't have a tone and cannot be misunderstood by a dog. Sometimes, our commands can get confused with other words and can result in inappropriate responses from the dog.

Combined with a good command word, a clicker will tell your dog exactly what you want them to do and streamline the entire process of getting your commands through to them. You'll never need to worry about whether they understand that what they're doing is right or wrong.

In the end, a clicker can be supplemented with simple affection and positive reinforcement and you'll never need to resort to the more controversial and inhumane training methods that are out there.

If you're having trouble with a furry little friend, one of the first things you'll be taught by any dog trainer is to exercise them and then train them with some basic tricks.

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Clicker training can make that much easier. For the best most comprehensive guide to clicker training go check out Canis Clicker Training:

<http://www.germanshepherd-training.net/go/clicker>

Do that and you'll be well on your way to a happy, obedient and healthy dog.

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