

Problem Solving Before There's a Problem

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So, you have your new puppy or dog. You've got everything you need for being a happy pet owner: food, bowls, leash, collar, toys, and a veterinarian. You can now sit back and enjoy the new member of your family.

But wait! Things start to go wrong and you find that precious puppy or bright, spirited dog is now wreaking havoc in your home. Did you make the right choice?

Things just aren't working out the way you expected and you think you just might have to give up that new family member. Perhaps you can fix the problem before it happens. Here are some suggestions for fixing those problems most often heard when pets are surrendered by their owners to animal shelters.

First, one of the best things to do for that new dog in your family is to get **you and your dog** into an obedience class. The wonderful thing about an obedience class is that it helps to build that special bond between you and your dog. It also gives you some of the tools for establishing yourself as your dog's leader.

Class instructors are also a wonderful resource for information and help that you can go to when problems arise. If they can't help you themselves, many times they know whom to recommend. A good type of obedience class to locate is a class that focuses on helping you and your dog pass the American Kennel Club's Canine Good Citizen test. Dogs that have passed the Canine Good Citizen test have demonstrated a basic level of obedience and good manners.

Some local dog training options are listed at the end of this article.

SOME QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PROBLEMS THAT CAUSE DOGS TO BE GIVEN UP BY THEIR OWNERS:

a) How do I train my dog to go to the bathroom outside?

House Training

House training your new dog can be a highly frustrating problem. It takes patience and a plan to help your dog build the habit of eliminating outside.

To help your dog succeed at house training rely on what is instinctive in dogs. They prefer not to soil where they sleep, eat, or drink. They also have preferences in where to eliminate. You can establish an area in your yard where you want your dog to eliminate. That is where you will take your dog, on leash. Until she develops a strong habit of eliminating there, it is important that you accompany her every time. If she eliminates somewhere else, then she'll be establishing a habit of eliminating there.

You can hasten the learning process by having treats in your pocket to reward the dog when it has successfully eliminated. Verbally praise the dog as you give the treat.

Once you've decided where you will take your dog to eliminate, set up your dog's living space. Remembering that your dog doesn't like to soil where it lives, make a small living space. A crate, a blocked off area in the kitchen, laundry room, or bathroom can be turned into your dog's living space. You can increase the size of your dog's living area as she gains control of her bowels and bladder. This will be where your dog should be when you can't closely supervise him. Place your dog's bed here. If spending time in another part of the house, move the dog's bed there so your dog can be with you and you can keep your eye on the dog. You can also use your dog's leash and tether the dog to you. If you catch your dog starting to eliminate, you can stop it and quickly move the dog outside to its elimination area.

The other important part of house training is setting your dog on a feeding schedule. Many people "free feed," leave food out all day for the dog to eat whenever it wants. There is a natural reflex between eating and eliminating. About 30 minutes after eating, a reflexive reaction causes your dog to feel the urge to eliminate. If you set up a feeding schedule you can estimate when your dog needs to go outside. With free feeding, your dog eliminates whenever he likes. Some house training links are included at the end of this article.

b) ***How do I stop my dog from chewing on everything?***

Chewing/Destroying Property

Some truths about dogs:

- Dogs, puppies in particular, explore with their mouths.
- Items that are within a dog's reach are fair game for exploration.
- Some breeds of dogs, such as retrievers, are chewers all their lives.
- Dogs can't discriminate between what they can chew and can't chew unless you show them.

Some strategies to use:

- Manage your dog's environment. Just as you would baby proof your house, puppy proof your house by getting the good stuff out of the puppy's reach.
- Items that can't be put out of your dog's reach can be coated with [Bitter Apple](#) spray, which has an unpleasant taste and will help discourage the dog from chewing the object. Warning - not all dogs are put off by the taste. Some dogs actually like the taste. You can also try liquid soap. Either of these will have to be reapplied.
- Purchase durable chew toys that can hold up to an aggressive chewer.

Some examples:

[Kong](#) brand toys have cavities that can be stuffed with cheese/peanut butter/kibble that will keep a chewer busy.

[Petstages Orka](#) toys are sturdy enough to survive aggressive chewers.

Sterile bones can also be stuffed with cheese and peanut butter.

Deer antlers also make good chew toys and don't splinter or get soggy like hooves/bones/or rawhide.

- Place chew toys around the house so you can redirect the dog from something you don't want chewed.
- Also, confining your dog when you can't supervise their activities will reduce the likelihood of your dog chewing something it shouldn't. If you can't supervise your dog, crate him or confine him in his living area with a chew toy.

A point about dog toys - Toys lose their value if your dog has unlimited access to all of his toys. Give your pet one or two toys to play with at a time. Decide when the dog gets to play with them and when they will be put away.

This adds to your importance as leader to your dog. You are the giver of good things! If your dog has ready access to a toy, it's not special and he may choose not to play with it. Only give them occasionally and take them up before the dog loses interest. You then have a valuable resource for keeping your dog focused on something that is safe to chew.

c) *How do I keep my dog from jumping on people?*

Jumping up is a way that a dog shows excitement and it is physically rewarding to them. Also, a dog cannot discriminate between who he can jump on and who he can't jump on. If you don't want the dog to jump on Grandma, you can't let it be okay for him to jump on the teenagers. You must have a firm, consistent "No Jumping on Anyone" rule. Any training strategy you use takes time. Trying it once won't work. Some strategies are listed below for a variety of situations.

Some Strategies:

- When entering the house and your dog greets you with jumping, ignore and walk away without saying anything. Don't touch, shove, or speak. (This all gives the dog what he wants, attention and touch.) Wait until the dog has settled and then give a calm greeting.
- When guests enter, have the dog on leash and treats near the door. Keep the dog at your side in a sit and feed treats as guests come in and get settled. Bring the dog in and put them on a down-stay beside you.
 - OrCrate the dog while guests arrive and release him to visit after everyone is seated. You should reward with treats when the dog is being calm. Remove the dog if he is being rude.
- Do practice sessions with the dog on leash. While in a sit have people approach you. If the dog jumps or lunges, give a sharp sound like "ach" or "wrong". The person should walk away without touching the dog. Put the dog back into a sit and try again. You can also hold a treat (protected in a fist) in front of the dog's nose. As the person approaches, let the dog lick the treat but don't give it to him until the person walks away.
- Be a tree. Stand with arms crossed at the chest, turn away, and if possible get close to a flat surface like a wall or door. Remain that way until the dog settles down. Return to that position if the dog starts jumping again.
- There is a special type of harness that you can purchase at local pet suppliers or online. They are called anti-jump harnesses.

You'll notice that I've not mentioned kneeing the dog as it jumps. That hurts. Is it going to build a positive relationship? What you can do is step in quickly and take up the space between you and the dog. Keep stepping into him if he tries to jump again. When the dog sits, give calm verbal praise.

- d) ***My dog growls when you approach his food dish or toys. How can I stop this?***

This is called resource guarding and it is a serious problem. If you are concerned that the dog will bite, get professional help. Before it reaches that point there are some management strategies you can use.

- To prevent squabbles or guarding if there are several pets in the family give each animal a place away from the others for meals. Discourage dogs that try to go to the other animal's bowls and lick it clean. Redirect or remove them.
- The "guarder" should get nothing without first performing a behavior that you give them. Make them sit or down before they receive treats or their food bowl. Do the same thing with toys. Don't leave toys down for them to help themselves.
- Try the "Trade" game: Have treats stashed around the house for easy retrieval. To get the dog to give you an object hold out one hand for the object and show the treat with the other hand. Say "Let's trade." If the dog puts the object down or in your hand, give him the treat.
- Use mealtime as training time. Give a command; give a small bit of food as reward. Repeat. Do this with about half of the dog's meal then feed the last half.
- Teach your children not to tease dogs with treats or toys. Holding the object out and then snatching it back is teasing. If pushed, the dog will grab the object and not even realize it has bitten the child.

Please don't try to "show who is boss" by alpha rolling or some other form of physical force. It can get you bitten badly. Seek the help of a professional.

e) How do I stop my dog from play biting?

Play biting is just that, playing, but that shouldn't be used as an excuse. Puppies nip and play bite as a way of establishing dominance in the puppy litter. They view you and children as members of the litter until they understand that you have a higher ranking. They need to understand that even the smallest baby in the family has a higher ranking than they, the puppy, have.

Here you can use one of the strategies already used in dog/wolf packs. If the puppy bites too hard, the one being bitten isolates it. Puppies will give a loud yip and move away from the biter. Adult dogs will give a correcting growl or snap and move away from the biter. Eventually the biter learns to curb his bites or spends a lot of time by himself.

- Avoid games that involve waving hands in front of the dog's face.
- If you play tug games teach the dog to release the tug toy. Do this by having treats available to "trade". Say "release" and hold out a treat. When the dog lets go to get the treat, give it and at the same time take possession of the tug toy. Play this

several times so the dog doesn't get the idea that when he releases, the game ends. Sometimes it does, and sometimes it doesn't.

- Don't let young children play tug games with the dog.
- Anytime the dog gets out of control with a game, move the dog to a quiet area for time out. This is when you have to be calm. Don't make a big deal fussing at the dog. If you must say something, say, "Uh-oh", and move the dog away from the fun. If the dog settles down, then you can try again.
- Caution, grabbing at the dog will possibly elicit a bite. Instead, turn away from the dog and walk away or keep a leash on the dog so you can take him away by the leash.
- Use an effective deterrent sound to indicate the dog has stepped over his limit. These should be words or sounds that have a "growl". "Wrong", "anh", "ssss" or some other sound that you can make that will interrupt what the dog is doing. Avoid overusing "NO". It loses meaning fast.
- Children should not run away from a dog. The sight of a small child running heightens prey drive in a dog, causing it to run and catch. Small children should never be left alone with a dog, no matter how trustworthy you think your dog is.
- Play bites can grow into real bites. It is never acceptable for a pet dog to put his mouth on a human. Don't accept it. Be consistent. It's another rule that applies to everyone in the family.

f) ***We want to get a dog, but our child is allergic. Are there any breeds that are "hypo-allergenic."***

The short answer to this is no. While there are breeders that advertise their breed as being good for people with allergies, there is no way to guarantee that a specific breed is good for all people with allergies.

Here is a quote from AllergyEscape.com:

But before we claim that there are dog breeds that are hypoallergenic, let's clarify that term. By "hypoallergenic" we mean breeds that result in a "reduced allergic reaction" among allergy sufferers; thus a smaller likelihood of causing allergy symptoms. Clearly, we do not mean "non-allergic," because non-allergic breeds simply do not exist.

Dog allergens are very small, sticky, and lightweight. Originating in a dog's skin, saliva, and urine, the dander and saliva allergens are able to drift about your home, contaminating everything. All dog allergen is not the same, however, which is good news for allergy sufferers. Some pet allergens are breed-specific, so some breeds produce less than others. Examples of breeds that can produce less allergen are poodles, Airedales, and schnauzers. These breeds shed their skin about every 21 days. Compare this to cocker spaniels, German Shepherds, and Irish setters, which shed their skin every three to four days and you can understand how some breeds allow you to "breathe easier."

I know what you're thinking; "I just need to find a hairless dog and that will end my pet allergy!" Nope, that won't do it. Although many people think "hairless" or short-haired dogs cause fewer problems for those with allergies, it is the dander (skin scales) that causes the most significant allergic reactions, not the length or amount of hair on the pet, according to the ACAAI. The fur, however, can present problems to the allergic individual. Dog fur can collect allergens such as pollen, dust, and mold and spread these allergens throughout your home.

This website gives a list of potential hypoallergenic dogs. It also gives a suggestion for testing to see if you or a family member is allergic to a specific dog.

To test, spend some time with the breed you are interested in. Look for signs of allergic reaction in yourself or your child. If you aren't sure that anyone in the family is allergic to dogs or cats, try a visit to the local animal shelter and look for signs of allergic reaction.

After you get the pet is the wrong time to decide that someone is allergic to the pet. The bonding has already occurred and then you must make that difficult decision to get rid of the dog or undergo extensive allergy treatments. A pet should be for the life of the pet. It shouldn't be a disposable item.

A FEW WORDS ABOUT THE STRATEGIES GIVEN

You will notice that I have not included any harsh corrections in the strategies. These ideas were given in hopes that you want to build a trusting, loving bond with your pet. There are no "quick fixes" other than managing your dog's environment. Training does not have to be harsh. It does have to be consistent, and you have to be calm when you train. Each new skill that you accomplish with your dog makes the bond that much better.

Our goal is for fewer dogs to be turned into the animal shelter by their owners. Training your dog and building a bond will hopefully reduce the need for you to give your dog up.

