

June 9, 2010

Dog Training: Nothing in Life is Free

The Humane Society of the United States



You're relaxing on the sofa reading the paper when your dog bumps your leg to get your attention. You ignore him so he plops his ball in your lap.

You ignore him again so, being a persistent pup, he sticks his head under the newspaper, making it impossible for you to read that story about what your neighbor was caught doing. Exasperated, you toss the ball for your dog. Boy, has he got you trained!

Do you wish the roles were reversed?

If so, a training technique called "Nothing in Life is Free" may be just the solution you're looking for. "Nothing in Life is Free" isn't a magic pill that will solve a specific behavior problem. Instead, it's a way of living with your dog that will help him behave better because he trusts and accepts you as his leader and is confident knowing his place in the family.

[What is "Nothing in Life is Free"?](#)

You have resources—food, treats, toys, and attention. Your dog wants those resources. Make him earn them. That's the basis of "Nothing in Life is Free." When your dog does what you want, he gets rewarded with the thing he wants.

You may also hear this aspect of training called "No Free Lunch" or "Say Please." Those are just other names for "Nothing in Life is Free."

How to practice "Nothing in Life is Free"

1. First, [use positive reinforcement methods](#) to teach your dog a few commands and/or tricks. "Sit," "Down," "Come," and "Stay" are useful commands. "Shake," "Speak," and "Roll over" are fun tricks to teach your dog.

2. Stop giving away resources. Do you mindlessly pet your dog for no reason? Stop. Your attention is a valuable resource to your dog. Don't give it away. Make him earn it.

3. Once your dog has mastered a few commands, you can begin to practice "Nothing In Life Is Free."

Before you give your dog anything (food, a treat, a walk, etc.) he must first perform one of the commands he has learned. For example:

- In order for you to put your dog's leash on to go for a walk, he must sit until you've put the leash on.
- When you feed your dog, he must sit and stay until you've put the bowl on the floor.
- Play a game of fetch after work and make your dog sit and "shake hands" each time you throw the toy.
- Rub your dog's belly while watching TV, but make him lie down and roll over before being petted.

4. Once you've given the command, don't give your dog what he wants until he does what you want. If he refuses to perform the command, don't give in. Be patient and remember that eventually he will have to obey your command to get what he wants.

5. Make sure your dog knows the command well and understands what you want before you begin practicing "Nothing in Life is Free."

The benefits of this technique

Requiring your dog to work for everything he wants is a safe, positive, non-confrontational way to establish your leadership position.

Even if your dog never displays aggressive behavior such as growling, snarling, or snapping, he can still manipulate you. He may be affectionate to the point of being "pushy," such as nudging your hand to be petted or "worming" his way onto the furniture to be close to you. This technique gently reminds the dog that he must abide by your rules.

Fearful dogs may become more confident by obeying commands. As they succeed in learning more tricks, their continued success will increase confidence and ultimately lead them to feeling more comfortable and less stressed.

Why this technique works

Dogs want good stuff. If the only way to get it is to do what you ask, they'll do it.

Good leadership encourages good behavior by providing the guidance and boundaries dogs need. Practicing "Nothing in Life is Free" gently and effectively communicates to your dog that you are the leader because you control all the resources.

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LEARN TO EARN PROGRAM

What is learn to earn?

Over the years, a number of useful “catch phrases” have been used to help describe to pet owners the importance of taking control of their pet and the environment. One of the best ways to do this is by control of rewards so that they are used exclusively to reinforce desirable behaviors. For example, food and treats, affection and attention, access to the outdoors, play and walks can be powerful reinforcers as long as the owner stops using these rewards for all behaviors except those that are the focus of training. Learn to earn, which was introduced as a dog training concept by William Campbell in the early 70's, is a simple catch phrase which perhaps best captures the concept that when something positive is given to the pet, he can learn that the behavior is desirable to repeat. Therefore it is essential that the rewards are given for the behaviors we want and not those that we do not want. In addition, by withholding rewards at all other times, it can be insured that the motivational value of the rewards remains high and that undesirable behaviors are not reinforced. Another catch phrase “no casual interactions” by Andrew Luescher helps to remind owners of this concept, all attention is earned through responses to commands and the reward is the attention or access to something the pet desires. Dr. Karen Overall uses the term “deference training” to focus on the idea that the goal is to have the pet learn to defer to the owner for each reward. Deference can be sitting and waiting quietly until the item is given. Not only does the pet become more settled and relaxed, but it becomes clear to the pet which behaviors will earn rewards (predictability) An alternative catch phrase that similarly reminds the owner that each reward should only be given for learning and training what is desired is Nothing in life is free a term coined by Dr. Victoria Voith . Reinforcing what we want in our pets rather than punishing what we don't want is the focus of an excellent guide to reward based training “Don't Shoot the Dog”, by Karen Pryor.



It is paramount that **you**
are in control at all times!

Can learn to earn be used to correct behavior problems?

This program is a very useful way to restructure your relationship. It is important that dogs should be taught the social boundaries of their environment and the fact that you are in control at all times. Control should be benign and non-confrontational. It is done by controlling what the dog has and what the dog gets. Equally important is that the pet understands what behaviors are desirable and what behaviors earn rewards. By providing rewards only for those behaviors that are desired, increasingly more accurate responses can be reinforced, and reinforcement of inappropriate behavior (e.g. attention seeking, play biting, jumping up) will cease. Rewards can be affection, attention, praise, food, treats, play, toys, etc. Choose the behaviors that you wish to reinforce and make it clear to your pet that these rewards have to be earned. In fact, the

first step in resolving many behavior problems will be to cease all casual interactions with the pet. In this way each and every one of the pet's rewards can be given to reinforce the desirable behavior, and to improve response to commands.

What happens if a problem arises?

Establishing a routine from the outset is important for dogs, so they know what is required of them and where the boundaries are. Without this they can become anxious and develop a range of problems. If the dog becomes disobedient, withdraw any reward normally given on completion of the exercise; this places you, the owner, in control. Ensure that the dog learns that the reward will only be reinstated once the task is completed satisfactorily. The dog must learn what behavior is needed to get the reward.

Rewards must be appropriate. For example food treats are often used as training rewards and are clearly less effective if used immediately after a meal. Similarly playing with toys will not be effective if the dog is continuously surrounded with toys. Therefore it is important if any form of behavior modification or re-training program has to be put in place that rewards are chosen with care and then withdrawn until the particular task is successfully completed. This will soon make it clear that the dog is not in control of these resources and will provide you with an opportunity to teach the dog what behaviors will be reinforced. Rewards can also be access to things the dog desires such as going outdoors or coming inside. Prior to receiving these items, the dog is asked to perform a simple task such as "sit" and the reward is only given if the dog complies.

How do we start?

This obviously depends on the problem behaviour. Start in a safe and non-distracting environment and the chosen reward is given for compliance. For example the dog is always asked to sit before he is petted, but if he does not sit, no attention is given. Once a reliable response is established from the dog practice the commands in a variety of environments and with all family members, or even strangers if appropriate for the particular problem.

Staying in control

It is paramount that you are in control at all times. Do this via the chosen reward for which the dog craves. Ensure that the reward is always earned. With a simple training procedure this usually means that before the reward is given the dog is asked to come, sit, stay, etc. Ensure the task has been successfully accomplished. Then reward!

Any training procedure should be broken down into simple components. For example, if you are training your dog to come to you and sit at your side, start by recalling your dog and rewarding as soon as he comes to you. Once this component has been reliably established get him to come but put him into the sit position before the reward is offered. With these exercises the dog soon learns that you are in charge.

What happens if my dog learns to anticipate the routine?

Change it! Some dogs rapidly learn to anticipate your routine. If that occurs, change the procedure. For example many owners ask their dog to sit before being fed. If your dog starts to sit before the command has been given, change the routine. Request the dog to either lie, or to stand. With repetition of these exercises your dog will soon learn that you are in charge and will look to you for instruction when uncertain rather than to take control in these situations. This is important since many dogs become anxious when uncertain and may attempt to use aggressive behaviours to take control. This is something that should not be tolerated, but should not be confronted with force.

What happens if my dog refuses to obey my commands?

Avoid confrontation or a situation that might lead to aggression or where you may not be able to maintain control. Terminate the exercise. Remember every time your dog fails to comply it reinforces his control, not yours. In other words, if you ask the dog to sit prior to opening the door, but the dog does not comply the door is not opened and you walk away.

How do I regain control?

A long lead and head collar is useful and can be used both outside when on walks and also in the home. Each time the dog is given a command that is not obeyed, use the lead and collar to achieve the desired response. Once achieved, reward the dog.

Repetition is important. Continue until the dog responds to verbal controls only without the need for the lead and collar control.

Depending upon the problem you will often find that continuous reinforcement is needed. Once the desired response is achieved switch to a program of variable and intermittent reinforcement. Sometimes the dog slips back and you may find you have to use the lead and collar and more frequent reinforcement.

*This client information sheet is based on material written by Debra Horwitz, DVM, Diplomate ACVB & Gary Landsberg, DVM, Diplomate ACVB
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Dogs: Positive Reinforcement Training

Just say yes to training your dog with treats and praise

The Humane Society of the United States

Remember how happy you were if your parents gave you a dollar for every A on your report card? They made you want to do it again, right? That's positive reinforcement.

Dogs don't care about money. They care about praise ... and food. Positive reinforcement training uses praise and/or treats to reward your dog for doing something you want him to do. Because the reward makes him more likely to repeat the behavior, positive reinforcement is one of your most powerful tools for shaping or changing your dog's behavior.

Rewarding your dog for good behavior sounds pretty simple, and it is! But to practice the technique effectively, you need to follow some basic guidelines.

Timing is everything

Correct timing is essential when using positive reinforcement.

The reward must occur immediately—within seconds—or your pet may not associate it with the proper action. For example, if you have your dog sit but reward him after he's stood back up, he'll think he's being rewarded for standing up.

Using a clicker to mark the correct behavior can improve your timing and also help your dog understand the connection between the correct behavior and the treat.

Keep it short

Dogs don't understand sentences. "Daisy, I want you to be a good girl and sit for me now" will likely earn you a blank stare.

Keep commands short and uncomplicated. The most commonly used dog commands are:

- watch me
- sit
- stay
- down (which means "lie down")
- off (which means "get off of me" or "get off the furniture")
- stand
- come
- heel (which means "walk close to my side")
- leave it

Consistency is key

Everyone in the family should use the same commands; otherwise, your dog may be confused. It might help to post a list of commands where everyone can become familiar with them.

Consistency also means always rewarding the desired behavior and never rewarding undesired behavior.

When to use positive reinforcement

The good: Positive reinforcement is great for teaching your dog commands, and it's also a good way of reinforcing good behavior. You may have your dog sit

before letting him out the door (which helps prevent door-darting)
before petting him (which helps prevent jumping on people)
before feeding him (which helps teach him good meal-time manners).

Give him a pat or a "Good dog" for lying quietly by your feet, or slip a treat into a Kong®-type toy when he's chewing it instead of your shoe.

The bad: Be careful that you don't inadvertently use positive reinforcement to reward unwanted behaviors. For example, if you let your dog outside every time he barks at a noise in the neighborhood, you're giving him a reward (access to the yard) for behavior you want to discourage.

Shaping behavior

It can take time for your dog to learn certain behaviors. You may need to use a technique called "shaping," which means reinforcing something close to the desired response and then gradually requiring more from your dog before he gets the treat.

For example, if you're teaching your dog to "shake hands," you may initially reward him for lifting his paw off the ground, then for lifting it higher, then for touching your hand, then for letting you hold his paw, and finally, for actually "shaking hands" with you.

Types of rewards

Positive reinforcement can include food treats, praise, petting, or a favorite toy or game. Since most dogs are highly food-motivated, food treats work especially well for training.

A treat should be enticing and irresistible to your pet. Experiment a bit to see which treats work best for your pet.

It should be a very small (pea-size or even smaller for little dogs), soft piece of food, so that he will immediately gulp it down and look to you for more. Don't give your dog something he has to chew or that breaks into bits and falls on the floor.

Keep a variety of treats handy so your dog won't become bored getting the same treat every time. You can carry the treats in a pocket or fanny pack.

Each time you use a food reward, you should couple it with a verbal reward (praise). Say something like, "Yes!" or "Good dog," in a positive, happy tone of voice. Then give your dog a treat.

If your dog isn't as motivated by food treats, a toy, petting, or brief play can be very effective rewards.

When to give treats

When your pet is learning a new behavior, reward him every time he does the behavior. This is called continuous reinforcement.

Once your pet has reliably learned the behavior, you want to switch to intermittent reinforcement, in which you continue with praise, but gradually reduce the number of times he receives a treat for doing the desired behavior.

At first, reward him with the treat four out of every five times he does the behavior. Over time, reward him three out of five times, then two out of five times, and so on, until you're only rewarding him occasionally.

Continue to praise him every time—although once your dog has learned the behavior, your praise can be less effusive, such as a quiet but positive, "Good dog."

Use a variable schedule of reinforcement so that he doesn't catch on that he only has to respond every other time. Your pet will soon learn that if he keeps responding, eventually he'll get what he wants—your praise and an occasional treat.

Caution! Don't decrease the rewards too quickly. You don't want your dog to become frustrated.

By understanding positive reinforcement, you'll see that you're not forever bound to carry a pocketful of goodies. Your dog will soon be working for your verbal praise, because he wants to please you and knows that, occasionally, he'll get a treat, too.

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REWARDS: LEARNING AND REINFORCEMENT

The best way to train your pet is through the proper use of positive reinforcement and rewards while avoiding punishment. The goal of training is to “learn” the proper task and/or behavior. The training sequence is to give a command, to get the desired response, and to use a reward to mark and reinforce the correct response. Generally the most difficult aspect of training is to find techniques that immediately get the desired response after each command (See our handout on basic training for more details).

How does learning take place?

Learning occurs by establishing the relationship between behavior and consequences. There can be different possible outcomes of behavior, and consequences can be positive or negative.

When there is a positive relationship between behavior and consequences, the more your pet performs a certain behavior, the more of the consequence it receives. If there is a negative relationship between behavior and outcome, the more of the behavior the pet does the less of the consequence it receives. When we increase a behavior by removing a stimulus this is known as negative reinforcement. For example, when a dog barks at an intruder (such as a letter carrier) the barking has been reinforced because the stimulus (letter carrier) was removed. Negative reinforcement can also be used for training when a pull on a head halter or a spray of citronella is terminated as soon as the desirable behavior is observed.



What is positive reinforcement?

Positive reinforcement is anything that increases the likelihood that a behavior will be repeated. There is a positive relationship between behavior and consequence. The more the pet does a behavior, the more consequence it receives and what it gets is good. This makes that behavior increase.

What kinds of things will a dog consider positive reinforcement?

They will differ from dog to dog. For some it may be a pat on the head, a play session, a fun toy, a walk, or a food treat. The key is to select the reward that motivates **your** pet. It can be useful to feed your dog, depending on its age, at one or two scheduled meal times. Training sessions can then be performed just prior to mealtime when the dog is at its hungriest. Most puppies can then be motivated with pieces of food. In the same way, toys, play sessions and affection can

be withheld until training time so that the dog is "hungrier" for these rewards and so that the pet learns what behaviors will be followed by rewards. The more predictable the rewards, the more likely for the pet to continue the behavior. On the other hand, if rewards are unpredictable (e.g. affection) the pet will not learn the desired response. Some of the dogs that are hardest to train are those that are difficult to motivate. These dogs may do better with a few special treats that are saved specifically for training sessions (e.g. hot dog slices, small morsels of cheese), or pieces of dog food sprinkled with flavoring such as powdered cheese or garlic. By the way, if there's no good reason to give your dog a treat, don't - it fills him or her up, and accomplishes nothing. Consider these tidbits and biscuits not as treats but as "training rewards". If these rewards are saved exclusively for training they become more motivating and the pet will learn quickly what behavior leads to that reward. Whenever you are giving the dog something of value from food to a walk, first give your dog a command so that each reward can be earned (See our handout on learn to earn).

How do I properly use positive reinforcement?

The proper use of positive reinforcement is more than just giving a treat or a pat on the head. The timing of the reinforcement is very important. Remember, your pet is behaving all the time. So, you need to be sure to reinforce the behavior that you want and not some other. Therefore, closely associate the reinforcement with the behavior you wish to increase. Reinforcement must immediately follow the behavior (within 3-10 seconds). If there is any delay, you run the risk of



the pet engaging in another behavior while you are administering the reinforcement. One example is when you teach a dog to sit. You tell your dog to 'sit', and manipulate her into the position. While you are saying 'good dog' and giving a food treat, the dog stands up. What has just happened? You have rewarded 'sit' and 'stand up'. Another example is when you are house-training your dog. You send your dog outdoors to eliminate and as soon as the dog is finished, you call the dog back into the house, dry her feet and give it a reward. What happened this time? You just rewarded your dog for coming back into the house and having the feet dried.

Should I reward my pet every time?

The frequency of reinforcement is important. The rate at which behavior is reinforced is called the "schedule". There are several different schedules of reinforcement.

- A. *Continuous reinforcement.* Every time your pet engages in a behavior it is reinforced with a reward. While this may sound like a good idea, it is actually less than ideal. If you reward a behavior continuously, once you cease rewarding the behavior, it will often stop. But continuous reinforcement is useful when first teaching a new task so that the animal learns the task that leads to a good outcome.
- B. *Ratio or variable rate of reinforcement.* The reinforcement does not come after each performance of the behavior but intermittently. This may mean that instead of a reward every time, the pet gets a reward every third time, then perhaps two in a row, then maybe not until the pet has performed the behavior five more times. What happens if you reward this way? Behavior tends to be stronger and last longer. This type of reinforcement is best instituted once the pet reliably knows the task you wish to teach and helps keep the pet responding at a high rate.

Start training new commands or tasks with continuous reinforcement but switch to intermittent, variable rates as soon as your pet is responding consistently.

What if my rewards are not working?

First, you may not be reinforcing the correct task. Remember the example of 'sit' and 'stand up'. Be sure that the timing of your reinforcement is immediately after the behavior you wish to increase. Second, you may be phasing out your reinforcement before your pet has adequately learned the new behavior. Go back to basics and be sure your pet understands what to do. Therefore, until your dog consistently responds to the command, it can be valuable to leave a leash attached so that you can immediately show your pet what it is "supposed" to do. It is also possible that you may be repeating commands several times, or in different ways and thus confusing your pet. Ask for our handouts on training for specific tasks for additional help.

What type of rewards should I use?

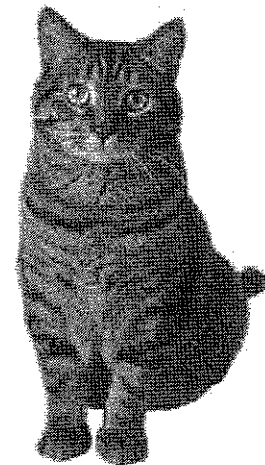
Rewards do not always have to be food. For many pets, owner attention can be a reward as can a walk in the park or a game of fetch. In fact, any time your pet is in the mood for some social interaction, and any time you are giving a toy, food or treat, you have the perfect opportunity to first train your pet to a command. If you do not keep track of when and where you give rewards you may actually be reinforcing undesirable behavior (see below). What is important is that it be appropriate and motivating for your pet. Remember, you need not give a "special" reward such as food each time your pet performs a task, but always acknowledge good behavior if only with praise or affection.

Is there a wrong way to reward my dog?

Yes. We may reinforce behaviors that we do not want. Remember that positive reinforcement makes behavior increase. So, there may be times when you may be inadvertently giving reinforcement when the pet is exhibiting a behavior that is undesirable. Giving any form of attention to a barking dog, a dog that is jumping up, or a dog scratching at the back door only serves to reward the behavior. Sometimes people even give a bit of food, pat the dog, or play with it in an attempt to calm it down. What they are really doing however is reinforcing the problem behavior. Similarly you may think that you are punishing your dog when you are indeed reinforcing behaviors. Examples include scolding your dog with an insufficiently harsh tone of voice, or gently pushing the dog away when it is play-biting. What is worse is that when these behaviors are rewarded occasionally or intermittently, the behavior becomes stronger and lasts longer (see above). A reward should never be given unless it is earned.

What are other ways in which rewards can be used?

There are other situations where rewards can be most helpful. For example, it may help a puppy or even an adult dog to learn to accept new people if that greeting is always coupled with a food treat. This will help the pet learn that new people bring something good. In other cases, rewards can be used to encourage desirable behavior. Food enhanced toys may encourage a dog to chew on them instead of the household possessions. Removal of a reward as soon as the dog exhibits undesirable behavior is another training tool known as negative punishment (e.g. stopping play when the dog bites too hard). In this example, the reward is used as a punishment since play biting should be reduced or cease since it leads to the reward being removed.



What type of rewards would I use for my cat?

Cats respond to training like dogs, however, they seem to need reinforcement at a higher rate than dogs to maintain performance. Food is often the best reinforcement for cats, but many will enjoy play sessions with favorite toys as well. Like dogs, finding small tidbits of human food, or special cat treats with high appeal, may be more motivating than regular food. Train your cat with these treats before mealtime, not after, and feed your cat on a meal schedule not free choice so that it is hungry at training times. Remember to think of toys and snacks as rewards, not as treats. It can be an extremely useful and fun exercise to train your cat to a few simple commands (come, sit, meal time). All it takes is to encourage the behavior (e.g. with a toy or food lure), reward the behavior, and once the cat will respond reliably, add a command. A leash and harness can also help to prompt the cat to get the desired response. These commands can come in very useful when you need to communicate with your cat.

What is clicker training and how does it work?

A clicker or an audible tone (found on some remote collars) can be paired with a food reward by consistently sounding it just prior to giving the food until it becomes a conditioned stimulus for food. The value of a clicker is that it can then be used as a reward to immediately mark correct responses in a convenient and precise manner, with the food being given shortly afterwards. By consistently pairing food with the clicker their value can be maintained throughout training. Highest-level rewards, including the clicker, can be used for initial training of new responses, and for counter-conditioning. Once the clicker is predictive of a reward, the clicker can be used as a bridging stimulus. This means that the clicker can be used to immediately as a positive marker of the correct response, and the food reward can be slightly delayed until it is available. For example if a dog were to eliminate outdoors or a cat eliminate in its litter and you were supervising so that you could immediately click, then even if you had to come indoors or go to the refrigerator to retrieve the treat, the pet would still associate the treat with the behavior. Clickers are an excellent way to gradually shape more elaborate or more accurate responses since it is possible to reinforce one small increment of behavior and then with each subsequent session, reinforce responses that are gradually closer to the final goal. In addition to clickers, favored food rewards can be paired with praise, stroking or petting.

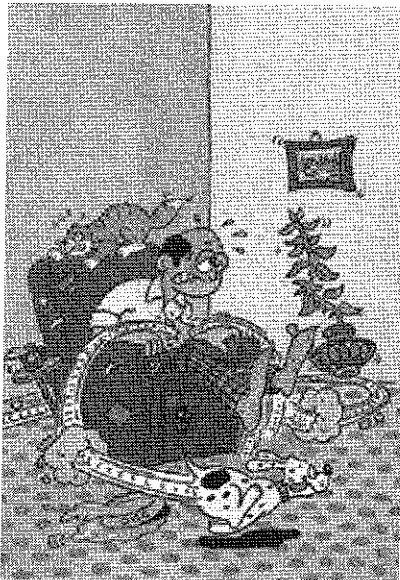
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TRAINING PROBLEMS: WHAT TO DO ABOUT DISOBEDIENT, UNRULY, AND EXCITABLE DOGS

How can I determine if my dog is just acting like a "puppy" or is too excitable or disobedient?

Many excitable and rowdy behaviors that we see in puppies will diminish with time and proper early training. For helpful information see our handouts on Puppy getting started right and puppy training. The unruly dog is one that continues to be difficult for the owner to manage past puppyhood or 6 - 9 months. Up until this age, puppies may also be excitable, difficult to control, or hard to train, but this would likely not be considered excessive when one considers normal puppy behavioral development and the time required to adequately train. The excitable, unruly or disobedient dog would be one that after sufficient attention to training, still does not respond to commands, will not walk nicely on a leash, jumps on people, continually barks for attention, steals things or generally wreaks havoc on the household. The problem is compounded in large dogs because of their size.



Do dogs get "attention deficit disorder" or can they be "hyperactive"?

While a hyperactivity disorder likely does exist in dogs, it is rare. Dogs that are hyperactive, also called hyperkinesia or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) can be diagnosed by veterinary examination and testing. Dogs with a hyperactivity disorder are difficult to train, respond poorly to tranquilization, may exhibit repetitive behaviors such as incessant barking or circling, may have gastrointestinal disorders, and can be extremely resistant to restraint. If these dogs do have attention deficit disorder they may respond paradoxically to amphetamine type drugs. This means that instead of getting more excitable when given amphetamines, these dogs tend to calm down and become more focused for training. Most cases however, are simply overly energetic dogs that may not be getting sufficient exercise and routine to their day, or who are being accidentally rewarded when they act

excitedly (see our handout on 'Play and exercise in dogs').

How can I prevent my puppy from becoming a disobedient dog?

Appropriate, frequent and regularly scheduled exercise sessions, providing appropriate outlets along with an early start to training can go a long way to preventing most unruly behaviors. Waiting to train your puppy until it is 6 months of age can often let these disobedient behaviors take hold. With early training, excitable puppies can often have their behavior channeled in the correct direction. A puppy must consistently be taught the rules and expectations of the family. Asking the puppy to sit for things, teaching the puppy how to relax and settle in a safe location

help teach the puppy the rules of the home and self-control. (Ask for our handouts on 'Play and exercise in dogs'; 'Puppy – getting off to a good start, puppy house training guide'; 'Puppy training: basics'; 'Teaching – sit, down, stand and stay'; and 'Teaching – come, wait, and follow', learn to earn and teaching how to settle on command). By providing a daily routine with sufficient exercise, chew outlets and training, and teaching the puppy the behaviors that will earn it rewards (learn to earn), most puppies will soon grow out of their problems.

I have tried training my dog without success. What went wrong?

Many owners may have tried traditional obedience training without success. Your dog may still jump on people, barks incessantly and defies commands. In many cases the issue is that the dog has not learned what you want him to do. Specific handouts are available on jumping up, teaching the dog to walk properly on leash and training of basic commands. Attempting to reprimand all the misbehavior will be ineffective. When you remove a behavior from the animal's repertoire it will be replaced with something else. In addition punishment is intended to teach the dog what NOT to do, and may make the pet fearful which could lead to avoidance (flight), freezing, or aggression (fight). Instead your goal should be to train and reinforce the behavior that you want your dog to exhibit or to prevent the undesirable behavior if you are unable to supervise and train. Therefore the key to changing excitable and disobedient dogs into calmer, better-behaved pets is to reinforce calm, settled behavior rather than punishing what you don't.



First, avoid confinement when you are home since this does not allow you to intervene and show your dog the appropriate behavior. Confinement may be necessary when you are not available to supervise your dog, but he or she must first be provided with sufficient exercise, an opportunity to eliminate, appropriate play and affection, food or treats for desirable behavior (i.e. training) and never for undesirable behavior (barking, attention seeking). In short, quiet, calm, and non-demanding behaviors should be rewarded with play, affection and attention, while demanding, jumping-up, or excitable behaviors should be met with inattention. See our handouts on controlled walk, controlling chase, controlling jumping and door charging for help with specific problems.

Another common training error involves actually reinforcing the behaviors that you do not want. Instead of patting, giving attention, or perhaps even a treat to try and stop the behavior, it is essential that these behaviors be met with inattention.

Reprimands and punishment are also often unsuccessful. Some pets will actually consider punishment itself as a form of attention. On the other hand, punishment that is too harsh may lead to anxiety, fear of the owner and problems such as aggression or submissive urination. Disruption devices such as a shake can (small stones in a tin can), an air horn, or an ultrasonic device may interrupt the undesirable behavior without causing fear of the owner. However, if praise for ceasing the behavior and redirection toward a new and acceptable behavior does not occur the dog is unlikely to change all that much.

How should I start to regain control?

Retraining should begin with good control and a good understanding of the proper use, timing and selection of rewards. An obedience training class that uses rewards and non-disciplinary techniques for control (such as head halters) is a good start. The goal is to get the desired response, reward the desired response, and gradually shape longer and more successful responses. Clickers can be an excellent way to mark and reward success. The dog should be well exercised and as calm and focused as possible when training first begins. Insure that you are in an environment where there are minimal distractions and that you have enough control so that a successful response to the command can be guaranteed. Ask for our handout on 'Rewards - learning and reinforcement'.

What do I do if disobedience and unruliness persists?

Most traditional training techniques and devices use punishment to interrupt and deter misbehavior. Punishment may teach a dog what not to do but it does not teach the dog to perform the desired response. Many of the devices that have been designed to control and train dogs are attached around the dog's neck to "choke" or correct. Not only can they create discomfort for the dog, they require extremely good timing to teach the dog the proper behavior. Head halters might prove to be a more positive and effective means of achieving the desirable response. Clicker training can also be used as a means of immediately marking and reinforcing behavior. (See our handout on training and control products).



The head halter has been designed to gain control over the dog's head and muzzle so that the handler is able to train the dog to perform the desired response. The goal of training is to encourage and reward correct responses rather than punish incorrect responses. The head halter increases control in a number of ways. Since dogs have a natural instinct to pull against pressure, a forward and upward pull on the leash will close the mouth and the dog will pull backwards and down into a sit. Therefore, whenever the sit command is given and the dog does not immediately respond, the owner can pull the leash up and forward, look the dog in the eyes, and get the desired response. As soon as the dog is sitting or even begins to sit, the restraint is released and the dog praised. The command, pull, and release should be immediately repeated if the "problem behavior" is repeated, and positive reinforcement (treat, patting, play) should be

provided if the dog continues to "behave". Using a leash and head halter, an upward and forward pull can be used to immediately and effectively control barking, jumping up, play biting, stealing objects, or pulling and lunging. The head halter also creates a situation "where the head follows, the body goes". See our handout on head halter training. Since the halter controls the head many behaviors can be prevented or interrupted merely by changing the direction of the dog. Lastly, and equally important, the head halter does not encircle and tighten around the lower neck, so that the dog is not choking while the owner is trying to train. See our additional handouts on stealing, going for a controlled walk, possessive aggression and chase behavior for other uses and training protocols with the head halter.

Some brands of head halters are designed so that they can be left on the dog, just like neck collars, all the time when owners are home. A long indoor lead can be left attached for control from a distance. As soon as the dog begins to engage in unacceptable behavior, it can be interrupted and directed into performing the desirable behavior ('sit', 'down', 'quiet'). By the

same token, if you give the dog a command and he does not obey, you can always get the compliance that you require if the halter and leash is attached.

Now that I have more control, what else do I need to do?

Often the key to turning an unruly dog into an acceptable pet is continuous control until you reliably can get the behaviors that you want. This is most easily accomplished by having the dog on a leash (attached to a body harness, non-choke neck collar or head halter). This allows you to immediately interrupt undesirable behavior and teach your dog the correct lesson. Once your dog no longer engages in the undesirable behavior, and responds to verbal commands, the leash should be removed. An integral component of controlling an unruly dog entails restructuring the situations so that the unruly behavior is not able to take place, or that interruption is immediate. This can take various forms such as keeping the dog on a leash so that it cannot run through the house, closing doors to other rooms, and limiting the access of the dog to areas where he is unsupervised. Only interact with the dog in a positive manner and set up situations so that the dog will do as the owner asks.

This brings up another vital issue in controlling excitable and disobedient dogs. Many owners are so frustrated that the only interaction that they have with the dog is negative. They have lost the joy of pet ownership. Worse than that, they do not reward the behaviors that they do want. It is more important to tell the dog when it is doing the correct behavior than it is to discipline the bad. It is also important to practice the training that you may ultimately need. An example of this is training the dog to 'sit' and 'stay' in the front hall. How will the dog know to 'sit' and not run out the door when people come to visit, (a highly excitable event), if the dog never practiced doing so when things were calm?

TEACH THE DOG WHAT YOU WANT IT TO KNOW BEFORE YOU NEED IT.

*This client information sheet is based on material written by Debra Horwitz, DVM, Diplomate ACVB & Gary Landsberg, DVM, Diplomate ACVB
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Crate Training

"Private room with a view. Ideal for traveling dogs or for those who just want a secure, quiet place to hang out at home."

That's how your dog might describe his crate. It's his own personal den where he can find comfort and solitude while you know he's safe and secure—and not shredding your house while you're out running errands.

Crating philosophy

Crate training uses a dog's natural instincts as a den animal. A wild dog's den is his home, a place to sleep, hide from danger, and raise a family. The crate becomes your dog's den, an ideal spot to snooze or take refuge during a thunderstorm.

The primary use for a crate is housetraining. Dogs don't like to soil their dens. The crate can limit access to the rest of the house while he learns other rules, like not to chew on furniture. Crates are a safe way to transport your dog in the car.

Crating caution!

A crate isn't a magical solution. If not used correctly, a dog can feel trapped and frustrated.

Never use the crate as a punishment. Your dog will come to fear it and refuse to enter it.

Don't leave your dog in the crate too long. A dog that's crated day and night doesn't get enough exercise or human interaction and can become depressed or anxious. You may have to change your schedule, hire a pet sitter, or take your dog to a doggie daycare facility to reduce the amount of time he must spend in his crate every day.

Puppies under six months of age shouldn't stay in a crate for more than three or four hours at a time. They can't control their bladders and bowels for that long. The same goes for adult dogs that are being housetrained. Physically, they can hold it, but they don't know they're supposed to.

Crate your dog only until you can trust him not to destroy the house. After that, it should be a place he goes voluntarily.

Selecting a crate

Several types of crates are available:

Plastic (often called "flight kennels")
Fabric on a collapsible, rigid frame
Collapsible, metal pens

Crates come in different sizes and can be purchased at most pet supply stores or pet supply catalogs.

Your dog's crate should be just large enough for him to stand up and turn around in. If your dog is still growing, choose a crate size that will accommodate his adult size. Block off the excess crate space so your dog can't eliminate at one end and retreat to the other. Your local animal shelter may rent out crates. By renting, you can trade up to the appropriate size for your puppy until he's reached his adult size, when you can invest in a permanent crate.

The crate training process

Crate training can take days or weeks, depending on your dog's age, temperament and past experiences. It's important to keep two things in mind while crate training:

The crate should always be associated with something pleasant.
Training should take place in a series of small steps. Don't go too fast.

Step 1: Introduce your dog to the crate

Place the crate in an area of your house where the family spends a lot of time, such as the family room. Put a soft blanket or towel in the crate. Take the door off and let the dog explore the crate at his leisure. Some dogs will be naturally curious and start sleeping in the crate right away. If yours isn't one of them:

Bring him over to the crate, and talk to him in a happy tone of voice. Make sure the crate door is open and secured so that it won't hit your dog and frighten him.

Encourage your dog to enter the crate by dropping some small food treats nearby, then just inside the door, and finally, all the way inside the crate. If he refuses to go all the way in at first, that's okay; don't force him to enter.

Continue tossing treats into the crate until your dog will walk calmly all the way into the crate to get the food. If he isn't interested in treats, try tossing a favorite toy in the crate. This step may take a few minutes or as long as several days.

Step 2: Feed your dog his meals in the crate

After introducing your dog to the crate, begin feeding him his regular meals near the crate. This will create a pleasant association with the crate.

If your dog is readily entering the crate when you begin Step 2, place the food dish all the way at the back of the crate.

If he remains reluctant to enter the crate, put the dish only as far inside as he will readily go without becoming fearful or anxious. Each time you feed him, place the dish a little further back in the crate.

Once your dog is standing comfortably in the crate to eat his meal, you can close the door while he's eating. The first time you do this, open the door as soon as he finishes his meal. With each successive feeding, leave the door closed a few minutes longer, until he's staying in the crate for ten minutes or so after eating.

If he begins to whine to be let out, you may have increased the length of time too quickly. Next time, try leaving him in the crate for a shorter time period. If he does whine or cry in the crate, don't let him out until he stops. Otherwise, he'll learn that the way to get out of the crate is to whine, so he'll keep doing it.

Step 3: Lengthen the crating periods

After your dog is eating his regular meals in the crate with no sign of fear or anxiety, you can confine him there for short time periods while you're home.

Call him over to the crate and give him a treat.

Give him a command to enter, such as "kennel." Encourage him by pointing to the inside of the crate with a treat in your hand.

After your dog enters the crate, praise him, give him the treat, and close the door.

Sit quietly near the crate for five to ten minutes, and then go into another room for a few minutes. Return, sit quietly again for a short time, and then let him out of the crate.

Repeat this process several times a day, gradually increasing the length of time you leave him in the crate and the length of time you're out of his sight.

Once your dog will stay quietly in the crate for about 30 minutes with you mostly out of sight, you can begin leaving him crated when you're gone for short time periods and/or letting him sleep there at night. This may take several days or several weeks.

Step 4, Part A: Crate your dog when you leave

After your dog can spend about 30 minutes in the crate without becoming anxious or afraid, you can begin leaving him crated for short periods when you leave the house.

Put him in the crate using your regular command and a treat. You might also want to leave him with a few safe toys in the crate.

Vary at what point in your "getting ready to leave" routine you put your dog in the crate. Although he shouldn't be crated for a long time before you leave, you can crate him anywhere from five to 20 minutes prior to leaving.

Don't make your departures emotional and prolonged—they should be matter-of-fact. Praise your dog briefly, give him a treat for entering the crate, and then leave quietly.

When you return home, don't reward your dog for excited behavior by responding to him in an excited, enthusiastic way. Keep arrivals low key to avoid increasing his anxiety over when you will return. Continue to crate your dog for short periods from time to time when you're home so he doesn't associate crating with being left alone.

Step 4, Part B: Crate your dog at night

Put your dog in the crate using your regular command and a treat. Initially, it may be a good idea to put the crate in your bedroom or nearby in a hallway, especially if you have a puppy. Puppies often need to go outside to eliminate during the night, and you'll want to be able to hear your puppy when he whines to be let outside.

Older dogs, too, should initially be kept nearby so they don't associate the crate with social isolation.

Once your dog is sleeping comfortably through the night with his crate near you, you can begin to gradually move it to the location you prefer, although time spent with your dog—even sleep time—is a chance to strengthen the bond between you and your pet.

Potential problems

Whining. If your dog whines or cries while in the crate at night, it may be difficult to decide whether he's whining to be let out of the crate, or whether he needs to be let outside to eliminate. If you've followed the training procedures outlined above, then your dog hasn't been rewarded for whining in the past by being released from his crate. If that is the case, try to ignore the whining. If your dog is just testing you, he'll probably stop whining soon. Yelling at him or pounding on the crate will only make things worse.

If the whining continues after you've ignored him for several minutes, use the phrase he associates with going outside to eliminate. If he responds and becomes excited, take him outside. This should be a trip with a purpose, not play time. If you're convinced that your dog doesn't need to eliminate, the best response is to ignore him until he stops whining. Don't give in; if you do, you'll teach your dog to whine loud and long to get what he wants. If you've progressed gradually through the training steps and haven't done too much too fast, you'll be less likely to encounter this problem. If the problem becomes unmanageable, you may need to start the crate training process over again.

Separation Anxiety. Attempting to use the crate as a remedy for separation anxiety won't solve the problem. A crate may prevent your dog from being destructive, but he may injure himself in an attempt to escape from the crate. Separation anxiety problems can only be resolved with counter-conditioning and desensitization procedures. You may want to consult a professional animal-behavior specialist for help.

May 19, 2010

How to Use a Head Halter

The Humane Society of the United States



"Whoa, Rover, whoa!" Sound familiar? If that's what it's like when you take your dog for a walk, you may want to consider getting a head halter.

What's a halter?

A head halter is a special kind of collar designed for dogs who like to pull their people when they walk. It consists of a strap that goes around your dog's nose and another strap that goes around his neck, just behind his ears. The leash fastens to the halter under the dog's chin to a ring that's also attached to the nose strap.

When your dog begins to pull, the design of the head halter causes the dog's nose to be turned down and back toward you, which makes it physically difficult for him to continue pulling.

The head halter is a very humane method of restraint because it doesn't cause any pain. It works much better to stop a dog from pulling than a choke chain or prong collar. Some brand names of head halters include "Gentle Leader," "Promise Collar," and "Halti." [Buy one at Humane Domain, our online store »](#)

How should it fit?

The head halter must be fitted properly to be effective and comfortable for your dog. The neck strap should be as high up on your dog's neck as you can get it, just behind his ears. The strap should be just tight enough for you to fit one finger between it and your dog's neck.

The nosepiece should be adjusted so that when your dog's mouth is closed, the nosepiece can slide down to where the skin begins on his nose—but not so loose that it can slide off the end of his nose. The nosepiece will sit naturally, just below your dog's eyes. Make sure that the metal ring to which the leash attaches is underneath his chin.

The head halter is a very humane method of restraint; It works much better to stop a dog from pulling than a choke chain or prong collar.

How will your dog react?

Most dogs will resist a head halter at first. The amount of resistance varies for each dog. When you first put the head halter on, your dog may try to get it off by pawing at his nose or rubbing his nose on the ground, on you, or on anything he can get close to. The best strategy is to keep his head up and keep him moving by using positive verbal reinforcement and treats.

Most dogs eventually accept head halters. When your dog associates the halter with going for a walk, he'll begin to react positively to it, and soon, both you and your dog will enjoy taking walks together!

Things to remember

- Make sure the head halter is fitted properly.

- Fit the halter so that it is snug around your dog's neck and high behind his ears, but loose enough around his nose so that the nose strap can slide easily down to the fleshy part of his nose.

- Don't confuse the head halter with a muzzle.

- Keep in mind that a dog wearing a head halter can still eat, drink, pant, bark, and bite, if he chooses.

- Never use a hard jerk with the head halter.

- Never use the head halter with a retractable lead.

- Be sure your dog doesn't run quickly to the end of the lead; if he does, he may give himself a hard jerk.

- Outfit your dog with the head halter only during on-leash walks with you and/or when you're directly supervising him.

- Don't allow your dog to wear the head halter around the house; he'll have plenty of time to work at getting it off, and will eventually succeed.

- Read the information sheet that comes with your head halter.

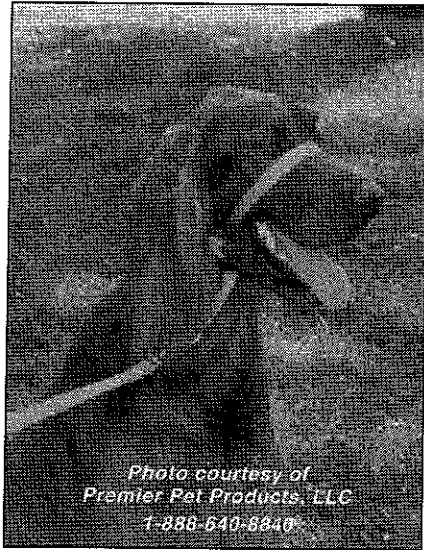
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HEAD HALTER TRAINING AND USE

Why should I halter-train my dog?

Head halters are commonly used as an alternative to collars and have many advantages. Firstly, they make control easier, requiring less physical effort, so you



*Photo courtesy of
Premier Pet Products, LLC
1-888-640-8840*

don't end up battling with your pet or trying to save your shoulders from being pulled out of their sockets when going for a walk like you do when using a flat neck collar. The head collar has a strap that encircles the muzzle, and where the nose goes the body follows ('aka' power steering for dogs). Secondly, dogs pulling on neck collars can injure themselves as the collar presses into the trachea and neck. Dogs that pull may also be at greater risk of becoming aggressive to strangers or others whom they meet out on walks as they associate trying to approach with unpleasant experiences. Thirdly, some forms of head collars give you control over the dog's mouth, which may help reduce the risk of your dog biting. However, if you know your pet has an aggression problem, a muzzle may be more

suitable (See muzzle training handout). For further details on how head halters compare to other training products see our handout "to choke or not to choke".

How do head halters work?

The head halter is an excellent aid for control and training. However, it is only a tool to help you achieve success. Some time and effort will be needed for your dog to adapt to wearing a head halter, and for you to insure that it is fitted and used correctly. Although it may be possible to use the head halter successfully with the aid of the support materials that accompany the head halter (along with this handout), additional guidance from a trainer who is familiar with head halter use may help to insure success.

Briefly, head halters work by applying pressure behind the neck and around the muzzle so that the pet can be prompted to display the desired response. At this point negative reinforcement (the release of tension on the leash) and positive reinforcement (rewards) can be given to let the pet know that it is now exhibiting the target behavior. When the pet responds consistently, verbal cues / commands can be added. Since pets tend to pull against pressure, a strategic but gentle pull in just the right direction may be all that is needed to get your pet moving in the opposite direction. For example, with a few inches of slack on the leash and the dog walking

with a head halter by the owner's side (or slightly behind), a pull forward should get the dog to back up (heel, follow). Pulling upward will close the mouth (barking, nipping) while a pull up and forward should back the dog into a sitting position. Slight modification to the head position can then be used to teach the dog to maintain eye contact (focus / watch). A pull from the side or behind can turn the head to achieve eye contact and direct the dog away from a stimulus. A gentle continuous pull rather than a jerk should be used to achieve the desired behavior. The second hand can be used under the chin, to help gently coax the pet into position. Once success is achieved, training should proceed to varied environments and slightly more complex tasks (e.g. teaching the dog to sit during greeting rather than jumping up).

The head halter can also serve as a tool to interrupt undesirable behavior and achieve the desirable response during training. For example, the head halter and leash can be used to prompt the dog to be quiet when barking, or to "stop" puppy mouthing. Similarly a pull on the leash can be used to immediately curtail pulling, barking, chewing, stealing, stool eating and some forms of aggression. With a long leash left attached, the head halter can also be used to interrupt behaviors from afar such as garbage raiding, housesoiling or digging.

Aren't halters irritating to dogs?

Halters themselves are not cruel, but like any collar they can cause irritation if a little time is not spent fitting the halter properly and training your animal to accept wearing it. If the guidelines below are followed, your pet should actually enjoy wearing the halter. The most common errors are to immediately think your dog will accept the new sensation on its face and allowing it to get the halter off.

How do I get my dog to feel comfortable wearing a head halter?

1. Show your dog the halter, let him sniff to investigate it and hold a treat through the open nose band so he voluntarily puts his nose through the ring. Repeat this procedure several times with the strap resting on the dog's nose for increasingly longer times before the treat is given. This starts to build a positive association with the muzzle loop.
2. With the Gentle Leader™ brand of head halter, the neck strap can be fitted separately from the nose band. Before proceeding to attaching the full halter, adjust the neck strap as with most other neck collars, but be sure to insure a snug fit (see fitting below).
3. Gradually expect more from your pet when you introduce the halter. Put the halter on and reward your dog with it on, and when you take it off. Slowly increase the time you leave it on and practice feeding treats with the halter on, but only when he is not pawing or rubbing at the collar. You may be able to keep your dog distracted by playing a game, giving treats or going for a short walk with the leash attached to the neck collar. Alternately you can leave the leash attached and use a gentle pull if your dog tries to paw at or pull off the head halter.
4. Next you can apply the head halter and lead, and leave the leash trailing. You should aim to work towards keeping your dog haltered for about five to ten minutes. Try to keep your dog distracted and playing and give rewards when he is not focusing on the head halter.

5. When you first begin to use the lead to control your dog, make sure your dog's attention is focused on you. You should be animated and talk to him continuously, with lots of verbal praise. This also serves as a distraction from the halter, which reduces the chances of him pawing at it. You can use a lure or target and many small tasty rewards to keep your dog focused and on task. Training can begin indoors, in your yard or on a short walk. Make sure you frequently change directions by applying gentle tension to the lead while keeping up the praise and treats. Alternatively you might play a game such as turning circles, in which your pet is encouraged to gently turn in one direction then the other. In this way your dog learns that you have control of the head with light pressure and verbal commands.
6. Never remove the halter when your pet is trying to remove it. He can be encouraged to leave it alone by a slight tug on a lead. When he relaxes, the halter can be removed. Consider whether you are expecting too much too soon. The important rule is to work at a rate that your pet can accept and cope with. This may mean that the whole program may take a few days rather than a few minutes.
7. In some cases a faster fitting technique may be preferred. First adjust and fit the neck strap and then take it off. Next, using treats or a favored toys a lure, distraction and reward, slip the nose strap over the nose and continue to distract the dog with the treats or toy while attaching the neck strap. Then, using a leash, favored food treats and plenty of praise, it may be possible to play with your dog or take him for a short walk while he gets accustomed to the head halter. By making the walk fun, keeping the pet distracted and using food rewards to mark the desirable response, many pets will adapt to the head halter by the end of the first training session.

How do I fit and use the head halter?

The keys to head halter success are to insure proper fitting, to understand how to apply and release pressure in training, and the proper use of rewards. Here is a brief overview for fitting and use of the Gentle Leader™

Ensure proper fit. The head halter should fit high against the back of the skull and snug enough that it will not slip around the neck when the leash is pulled. By insuring a snug fit of the neck strap, the nose band can be adjusted so that there is little or no constriction. When first applying the head halter, it can be helpful to first ensure that the neck strap is properly adjusted, and then remove the neck collar. Next, offer food treats through the nose loop and when the dog extends its nose through the loop, give the treats to reward and distract the dog while attaching the neck strap.

Get the desired response. By constantly maintaining a few inches of slack on the leash, only a short gentle pull should be needed to get the desired response. A pull up and forward can achieve eye contact (for target training, control and safety), close the mouth, and get the dog to heel, sit or focus. As soon as the desired response can be consistently achieved, a cue word (command) can then be added.

Motivate. An encouraging calm voice, targeting, and appealing eye contact should be used to help motivate the pet to respond. Positive reinforcement is then given when the dog responds appropriately.

Command training. If the owner gives a command and the dog does not immediately respond, the head halter is pulled immediately and gently (but firm enough to succeed) to achieve the desired response (sit, heel, quiet). The owner then releases tension as soon as the desired response is achieved. If the desired response is maintained, a reward is given immediately (e.g. food, clicker, toy, praise, stroking) to mark the correct response so that future success is ultimately driven by rewards.

Pull – release – reward. By pulling on the head halter, the desired behavior can be quickly achieved and the pressure released when the response has been achieved. As the owner releases (by letting out a small amount of slack), the dog may then continue to exhibit the desired response (for which a reward should be given) or may begin to resume the undesirable response (e.g. tries to stand, lunge ahead, bark), in which case the pull (tension) should be reapplied. In some cases it may take numerous repetitions of the pull and release to get the desired response but the total time to achieve success might not be much more than a few seconds. By releasing only a small amount of slack, it will require only a slight pull to regain control.

How do I use the head halter to treat behavior problems?

Once the head halter is fitted properly and can be used successfully to achieve a relaxed sit and heel in the absence of any distractions, the owner can proceed to more complex tasks and more difficult environments.

To achieve a relaxed sit and focus: The dog can be taught to sit and stay for gradually longer periods of time before the reward is given. The leash should be relaxed with a few inches of slack, but if the dog begins to rise or break focus a gentle pull up and forward should be used to maintain the sit. For most problems, training should then proceed to greater degrees of relaxation, by watching the dog's body postures and breathing, and reinforcing only when sufficiently relaxed. The owner can then begin to move away from the dog (still maintaining only an inch or two of slack) to train the dog to stay and not to follow or lunge forward.

To teach a relaxed down, the dog is reinforced for lying in place with a short amount of slack on the leash, and reinforced for gradually longer down times. If the dog begins to rise during the session the leash is used to maintain the down position. Rewards are given and the dog released to rise at the end of each session. As with sit / focus, the goal is to reinforce gradually longer and increasingly more relaxed sessions of down time. Relaxation can be observed by monitoring breathing and body postures (e.g. lying over onto one hip).

Another useful command is to teach the dog to go to its mat or bed and stay in place until released. Again progressively longer and more relaxed behavior should be reinforced before release.

Once the dog will settle and relax in a sit, down, or on its bed, these commands can be used as part of a program to improve undesirable behavior. Since the goal of retraining is to teach the dog the desired response, rather than to punish undesirable behavior, the commands and head halter can be used to help achieve success. For

example the dog can be trained to sit and focus or to lie down calmly when visitors come to the front door and be reinforced for proper greeting behavior.

Similarly if the dog is trained with a head halter and rewards to walk with a slack leash by the owner's side (heel), then the heel exercise (or sit and focus) and the head halter can be used to keep the dog calm and under control in environments where it might lunge or jump up during a walk.

For specific applications and problems see our other handouts.

This client information sheet is based on material written by Debra Horwitz, DVM, Diplomate ACVB & Gary Landsberg, DVM, Diplomate ACVB

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CANINE: CONTROLLING JUMPING UP AND DOOR CHARGING

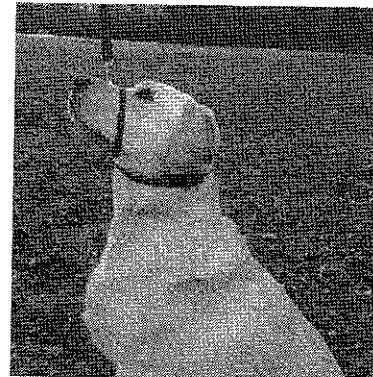
My dog charges the door whenever someone knocks or rings the bell, what can I do?

Door charging and uncontrollable excitement when visitors arrive is extremely disconcerting and potentially dangerous. Without proper control of your dog he could charge out the door and into the street where he might get injured. If this behavior is also accompanied by aggressive responses such as aggressive barking, growling, snarling, lunging, snapping or biting you should seek the guidance of a veterinary behaviorist since this presents risks to those who enter your home. With or without aggressive responses, until you can change the dog's behavior he must be securely confined before you answer the door. This could be in another room, behind an inescapable barricade or closed door, in a crate or by an adult holding the dog on a leash (preferably with a head halter for additional control).

To deal with door charging without aggression start by teaching the dog to 'sit' and 'stay' for a food reward in the entry area. If the dog cannot sit and settle at the door without distractions, you should not expect to be able to control the dog when the door is opened or when visitors arrive? Training is likely to be most successful and most effective if you utilize a head collar and leash. It may help to use a mat or rug to designate the proper place for the dog to relax and settle for training. As the dog learns to a relaxed sit or down-stay or settle on a mat (see our handout on settle exercises) you should be able to walk to the door, touch the doorknob or even open the door without the dog moving. If the reward is sufficiently motivating the dog should soon look forward to staying in place each time you practice approaching and opening the door. Gradually phase out food treats when the behavior is learned and can be reliably repeated. If barking is a big part of the problem you also should work on controlling barking by using our handout on barking in dogs.

Each time you leave the house, also be certain to practice training calm doorway behaviors. If you are taking your dog for a walk, teach him to sit and settle before leaving the house and have him follow you on a controlled walk as you leave. If your dog is staying home when you leave and he begins to get excited or anxious, teach him to lie quietly on his bed or mat, and reward this with a stuffed food toy or special chew, before walking out the door.

Next you may need to practice getting the desired response with people entering the home. Begin with family members. First have them enter while the door is open so they can be seen. Next have them ring the bell while the door is open and then enter. Finally try with the door closed. Each time, get the dog to sit and stay or a settled down. Also practice proper greeting behaviors by having your dog sit quietly (or even give a paw) before the special treat or petting is given. Again a head halter can help to ensure that the desired



behavior is achieved before rewards are given. By closing the door, then re-entering and greeting multiple times in the same session, your dog's excitement level should gradually decrease, making it progressively easier to accomplish a proper greeting. Another option is to have the dog stay on its mat as you open the door and enter, and then bring the dog in a controlled walk out where it should be taught to greet by sitting quietly for a treat and petting. Once your dog has mastered arrivals and greetings with family members, proceed to other friends and family members with whom your dog is familiar. Use a leash and head halter to ensure the right behavioral response (sit / down / mat) is achieved, and give favored food rewards to ensure a positive outcome. Always require your dog to 'sit' before it gets petted and you can go along way to eliminating jumping behavior.

How can I prevent my dog from jumping up on others and me?

For many dogs, jumping up on people is part of their greeting routine. Often, owners have tried to discourage this behavior using methods such as squeezing the front feet, stepping on the dog's toes, or kneeling the dog in the chest. Yet the behavior continues. For some dogs these techniques provide an uncomfortable but acceptable form of attention. For others, the technique leads to increasing anxiety as people arrive at the door, and conflict behaviors such as circling or urine leaking can develop since the pet is motivated to greet as well as avoid. Therefore in both cases the problem is gradually being further aggravated. If that is the case with your dog, then it is important to think about what might be motivating the dog to jump up and what is the reinforcement for the behavior continuing, and to avoid exposure until you can gain sufficient control with verbal commands, head halter training or both.

Usually the motivation for the jumping up behavior is to greet people. Many dogs like to greet "face to face", like they do with their canine counterparts. Some people, however, find this objectionable. Dogs that jump up can also cause injury or scare the visitor. The visitor's reaction to the dog (whether it be fear or retaliation) would then serve to make the dog anxious about further visitors coming to the home. In addition, strong punitive responses when people enter the home can create anxiety and could make the dog aggressive as he anticipates that people entering the home create an aversive situation for him. Correction therefore must not be directed at punishing the problem, but rather at finding a means of teaching the dog an appropriate greeting behavior. This usually is a sit/stay, which can then be rewarded with food and attention. Once the dog has perfected this at the doorway, when there are no people coming or going, its time to begin practicing with family members, before progressing to familiar visitors and then to greeting new people arriving at the home. Make the dog sit and stay when people arrive and give the dog the special training treat. If the dog gets up, then put him back in the sit and try again until the dog remains sitting through the arrival. Often placing a "treat jar" by the front door with a bell on it will help. Once the dog associates the bell on the jar with a treat, and a treat with a sit/stay, the dog will be more likely to perform the task.

Another way to train this behavior, if you feel that you have sufficient control, is to set up visitors to come to your home. You will likely have the best control of your dog if you use a head collar and a leash for this exercise. Have the first person come to the door. Instruct your dog to 'sit' and 'stay'. Then, let the visitor in. Hopefully, with some effort, you will get your dog to continue to sit. Have the person enter, give a treat and sit down. After five minutes, have them leave by the back door, come to the front and enter again. This second entry should go easier as your dog will have just seen the person. If you can repeat this 4-6 times for each visitor, the dog will have plenty of opportunity to learn the new task.

Once you understand the motivation, and have trained a new task, you need to be sure you have identified all the reinforcement for the behavior. If the dog succeeds in getting any attention for the jumping behavior, then the dog will continue to jump. Attention includes petting, pushing away, (which resembles play behavior), and even mild reprimands, all of which can be reinforcing for a dog that really wants attention. To change this behavior you need to remove ALL reinforcement. This may mean that you do not look, speak, touch or interact with the dog IN ANY WAY when it jumps on you. Walk by the dog, give a command such as 'sit', but do not interact with the dog. Alternately, you could try a disruptive stimulus to see if you can disrupt the behavior just as it begins.

To use disruption for jumping up, you need to be able to QUICKLY AND HUMANELY interrupt the behavior. This is often best done with some type of device that makes a loud noise. Shaker cans, ultrasonic trainers, rape alarms, and air horns, all make loud noises that will often startle the dog. As soon as the dog hesitates, you need to give the dog an alternative command so that the dog can do the proper thing, and then reward the dog with praise. So, as you administer the noise, you say "SIT" and when the dog sits you reward it with praise and food treats if available. Many dogs soon learn that, to avoid the noise, they need to sit and will do so to greet you. Then have the person leave, and re-enter the home. Use the device and command if the dog does not immediately sit, and a "good sit" and reward as soon as the dog does sit. Continue to have the person leave and re-enter until the dog sits for its reward without hesitating. Another efficient but costly means of immediate interruption is to use a citronella spray collar. Bark activated collars are useful if the dog also barks as people arrive at the door. Alternately a remote collar can be used to interrupt the jumping and reinforce the desirable response (e.g. sitting).

Another method that is consistently successful at deterring and preventing the jumping up is to leave a leash and head halter on the dog during greeting. All it takes is stepping on the leash or a quick sharp pull to prevent or disrupt the jumping up. Again, be certain to reward non-jumping behavior.

Some people like to allow the dog to jump up on them at certain times. You must never allow the dog to choose the time or the dog will continue to do this behavior whenever it is in the mood, and could learn to greet all people in the same uncontrolled manner. Therefore, if you enjoy this type of greeting first teach your dog to settle and relax for greetings and then teach your dog a command "give me a hug" or "come up here". This way, you have the behavior under verbal control and you decide when the dog will be allowed to jump up.

November 3, 2009

Chewing: The Whys and Hows of Stopping a Gnawing Problem

The Humane Society of the United States

Sooner or later every dog lover returns home to find some unexpected damage inflicted by his or her dog; or, more specifically, that dog's teeth. Although dogs make great use of their vision and sense of smell to explore the world, one of their favorite ways to take in new information is to put their mouths to work.



Fortunately, chewing can be directed onto appropriate items so your dog isn't destroying things you value or jeopardizing his own safety. Until he's learned what he can and can't chew, however, it's your responsibility to manage the situation as much as possible, so he doesn't have the opportunity to chew on unacceptable objects.

Why dogs chew

Puppies, like infants and toddlers, explore their world by putting objects in their mouths. And, like babies, they teethe for about 6 months, which usually creates some discomfort. Chewing not only facilitates teething, but also makes sore

gums feel better.

Adult dogs may engage in destructive chewing for any number of reasons. In order to deal with the behavior, you must first determine why your dog is chewing—and remember, he's not doing it to spite you. Possible reasons for destructive chewing include:

- As a puppy, he wasn't taught what to chew and what not to chew.
- He's bored.
- He suffers from [separation anxiety](#).
- His behavior is fear-related.
- He wants attention.

Important! You may need to consult a behavior professional for help with both separation anxiety and fear-related behaviors.

Manage the situation

Take responsibility for your own belongings. If you don't want it in your dog's mouth, don't make it available. Keep clothing, shoes, books, trash, eyeglasses, and remote control devices out of your dog's reach.

Give your dog toys that are clearly distinguishable from household goods. Don't confuse him by offering shoes and socks as toys and then expecting him to distinguish between his shoe and yours. [More about dog toys »](#)

Supervise your dog until he learns the house rules. Keep him with you on his leash in the house so he can't make a mistake out of your sight. Confine him when you're unable to keep an eye on him. Choose a "safe place" that's dog-proof, and provide fresh water and "safe" toys. If your dog is crate trained, you may also place him in his crate for short periods of time.

Give your dog plenty of people-time. Your dog won't know how to behave if you don't teach him alternatives to inappropriate behavior, and he can't learn these when he's in the yard by himself.

Give your dog plenty of physical and mental exercise. If your dog is bored, he'll find something to do to amuse himself and you probably won't like the choices he makes. On the other hand, a tired dog is a good dog, so make sure he gets lots of physical and mental activity. The amount of exercise should be based on his age, health, and breed characteristics.

If you catch your dog chewing on something he shouldn't, interrupt the behavior with a loud noise. Offer him an acceptable chew toy instead, and praise him lavishly when he takes the toy in his mouth.

Build a toy obsession in your dog. Use his toys to feed him. At mealtimes, fill a Kong-type toy with his kibble.

If your puppy is teething, try freezing a wet washcloth for him to chew on. The cold cloth will soothe his gums. Supervise your puppy so he doesn't chew up and swallow any pieces of the washcloth.

Make items unpleasant to your dog. Furniture and other items can be coated with a taste deterrent (such as Bitter Apple®) to make them unappealing.

Caution! Supervise your dog when you first try one of these deterrents. Some dogs will chew an object even if it's coated with a taste deterrent. Also be aware that you must reapply some of these deterrents to maintain their effectiveness.

Offer your dog a treat in exchange for the item in his mouth. As your dog catches on to this idea, you can add the command "Give" as his cue to release the object in exchange for the yummy treat.

Don't chase your dog if he grabs an object and runs. If you chase him, you are only giving your dog what he wants. Being chased by his human is fun! Instead call him to you or offer him a treat.

Have realistic expectations. At some point your dog will inevitably chew up something you value; this is often part of the transition to a new home. Your dog needs time to learn the house rules and you need to remember to take precautions and keep things out of his reach.

What not to do

Never discipline or punish your dog after the fact. If you discover a chewed item even minutes after he's chewed it, you're too late.

Animals associate punishment with what they're doing at the time they're being corrected. Your dog can't reason that, "I tore up those shoes an hour ago and that's why I'm being scolded now." Some people believe this is what a dog is thinking because he runs and hides or because he "looks guilty."

In reality, "guilty looks" are actually canine submissive postures that dogs show when they're threatened. When you're angry and upset, your dog feels threatened by your tone of voice, body postures, and/or facial expressions, so he may hide or show submissive postures. Punishment after the fact will not only fail to eliminate the undesirable behavior, but could provoke other undesirable behaviors as well.

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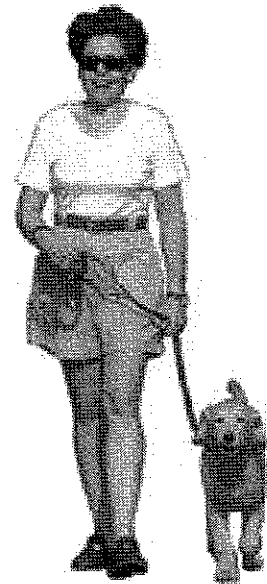
PLAY AND EXERCISE IN DOGS

Why are play and exercise important?

Play with owners and with other dogs provides your dog, not only with an outlet for physical exercise, but also helps to fill your dog's social needs. Insufficient exercise can contribute to problem behaviors including destructiveness (chewing and digging), investigative behavior (garbage raiding), hyperactivity, unruliness, excitability, attention-getting behaviors, and even some forms of barking. It is especially important to ensure that a dog's need for exercise and social interaction have been met prior to leaving the dog alone at home and prior to lengthy crating or confinement sessions.

What are good ways to play with and exercise my puppy or dog?

Taking your dog for a walk is good exercise and can be enjoyable and healthy for you as well. From an early age you should accustom your puppy to a collar and leash. A flat nylon or leather collar or a leash and body harness usually works well. Keep your puppy away from stray dogs and neighborhood parks until all booster vaccinations are given. However, since socialization at this age is very important, insure as much play and exercise with healthy, vaccinated dogs as possible. A puppy class might be a good place to meet and play with other puppies as well as their owners. Practice walking skills in your own yard first. Put your puppy on a leash and, with your voice and a small tug, or perhaps a food or toy reward as a prompt, encourage it to follow you. Reward the good behavior with praise. Keep initial walks short to encourage compliance. For dogs that are difficult to walk see our handouts on 'settle' and 'going for a controlled walk'. For adult dogs that pull excessively, a head halter or a no-pull harness may help settle the dog and make walks more pleasant. Keep in mind that the walk does not have to be long. In fact, a short 10-15 minute "sniff" walk can be very enjoyable for your dog. Even on longer walks you can alternate periods of controlled walking at a heel with periods where the dog can explore and sniff the environment. Putting these sniffing and exploration times on a release command such as "OK", helps the dog to understand that the controlled walk is to be maintained until the release command is given. Dogs find the scents in the environment stimulating and interesting and a good "sniff" walk can enrich your dog's day.



Playing with your pet is an enjoyable activity for both of you. Not only does your dog get exercise, but also positive interactions take place. Training sessions can also be part of each play session so that you can gain further control, while providing social interaction between you and your pet. Many dogs also enjoy learning new tricks such as jumping through a hoop, shake, play dead and more.

How much exercise and play is appropriate?

Selecting an appropriate amount and type of play and exercise will depend on the type of dog. Puppies and even adult dogs from breeds that have been bred for their stamina or to do "work" often have higher exercise requirements. For purebred dogs, consider their traditional work and the normal amount of energy that would expend when deciding the type and amount of play to provide. For example, the retrieving breeds do best with lengthy games of fetch or "Frisbee", while the sledding breeds might prefer pulling carts, or running or jogging with an active owner. Terriers may prefer sniffing and catching "prey", while herding breeds might be suited to focused training and agility.

The length and type of play and exercise for your dog will depend on its behavioral requirements and health limitations. While some dogs may still be ready for more after a five-mile jog and a game of fetch, others may be tired and satisfied after a short walk around the block. The idea is to enrich the quality of life for your dog and yourself, not to create a canine athlete.

How can I keep my dog occupied when I am away?

When you are out, or you are busy at home with other activities and responsibilities, it would be ideal for your dog to be relaxed and sleeping, but this will not always be the case. Exploring the environment, stealing food items, raiding garbage cans, chewing or digging, are just a few of the ways that dogs will find to keep themselves occupied. (See our handouts on stealing, possessive aggression for additional information) When you are confident that you have provided your dog with sufficient play and interactive exercise, and you must leave your dog alone, provide sufficient toys and distractions to keep your dog occupied and confine your pet to a safe, dog-proofed area. Pets might be kept occupied and stimulated when you are not available to supervise with chew toys, many of which can aid dental health. These products might either be edible such as rawhide, pig ears, hooves, or dental treats, or inedible chew and dental toys made from rubber, rope or nylon. There are also a wide variety of manipulation toys that can be stuffed with food or treats. Some release food during chewing; some dispense food when rolled along the floor; others can be stuffed or coated with dog food, cheese, liver, or peanut butter. (See our handout on 'Destructiveness chewing'). Dogs that are housed outdoors might prefer an opportunity to dig (see our handout on destructive digging). Some dogs enjoy watching pet videos and some do best when housed with another dog for play and companionship, although this can result in rowdy activity in your absence.

It may also help to keep the dog away from windows where the dog might engage in territorial displays as people and cars pass by the house. Dogs should not be left outside while you are not home. Not only is your dog subjected to the elements (heat, cold, rain, snow) but also your dog could escape and be lost or injured. In addition they may engage in inappropriate barking and territorial behaviors that have the potential to develop into problem behavior without the benefit of owner direction and control.

What type of games can I play with my dog?

Playing with your dog not only provides an opportunity for exercise and positive social interactions, but it can also be a fun way to train, since each time you give your dog a treat or toy or each time he fetches and retrieves, you can practice a training command such as "come", "sit", "fetch", "get it", "drop it" or "stay". A variety of types of interactive toys are available for throwing, retrieving and kicking, such as flying disks, balls and rubber hockey pucks. These types of toys are generally not designed to be chew toys, but they are used for games of fetch, teaching retrieval skills, and as training rewards. Other games that you might play with your

dog include a) hide and seek, where one family member goes off and hides and the puppy is then called to "come" and gets a treat and praise when he finds the person b) search games where you set out small bags, boxes or bowls with a favored treat or favored toy inside and have your dog search for these c) follow the leader where you step away from your puppy and call him to "come" to get a treat. Then run away and say "come" and reward with a treat before running off again d) "drop" or "give" which is an exercise that helps to teach your puppy to give up toys for something even more valuable. Giving your puppy a toy and then offering it something even more appealing might do this. Use the word "give" or "drop" and have your puppy drop the toy in your hand; then trade for the other toy or treat (also see our handout on canine stealing and teaching give). This can also be practiced during tug and fetch games in which case you can give a treat or return to the tug and fetch games as a reward e) get it where you teach your puppy to pick up items off the floor by tossing very small treats and saying "get it". Continue by tossing small treats in different directions. Next toss a favored play toy and when the puppy picks it up give a treat.

What type of play should be avoided?

Try to avoid games that pit your strength against your puppy or dog. Tug-of-war games seem to be an enjoyable diversion for many puppies and dogs and they do help to direct chewing and



biting toward an acceptable play object, rather than an owner's hands or clothing. On the other hand, some pets get very excited, overly stimulated and become far too aggressive during tug-of-war games. A general rule of thumb for tug-of-war (or any other game for that matter) is to avoid it, unless you are the one to initiate the game, and can stop it as soon as the need arises. Don't allow your puppy to demand or initiate tug games since this could escalate to pulling on your or your clothing or stealing towels or clothing items to try and get you to play. You should always schedule and initiate these games. Teaching the dog to "drop" on command before beginning the tug games can help to ensure that you remain in control of object play sessions such as fetch and tug-of-war. Tug toys may be made of rope, nylon, or fleece. Once you have good control of the game you can schedule regular tug games as a play exercises. However, this is not a good game for children or for family members that do not have the necessary level of control. If teeth come in contact with hands, if aggression escalates beyond play, or the dog is

unwilling to give up the tug toy, the game must end immediately.

Although games like chase are good exercise, they can often result in wild exuberant play that gets out of control. Similarly games of fetch can be both a great game and learning experience, but only if your dog learns to bring back and drop the toy so that the game can continue. Again, a good rule of thumb is to only play these games if you are the one to initiate the game, and are capable of stopping the game immediately should it get out of control. If you play a game in which the dog gets too excited, begins to nip or won't settle down, then you should first practice your sit, down and go to your mat training exercises so these can be used to settle the dog at the end of each game (See our handout on settle exercises).

How can I teach my puppy to play fetch?

Most young puppies, even those that do not have an inherent instinct to retrieve, can be taught how to play fetch from an early age. You will need to train your puppy to do three things; go get

the toy, bring it back, and relinquish it to you so that you can throw it again. First, make the toy enticing. Try a squeaky toy or a ball. Get your puppy's attention, toss the toy a short distance, 1-2 feet, and encourage your puppy to go to it. When it gets there give it praise. If your puppy picks up the toy in its' mouth, say 'good dog', then, move backwards a short way, clap your hands and entice your puppy to come towards you. All the while you should be encouraging verbally with a happy tone of voice and lots of praise. When your puppy returns to you, say 'give it' or 'release' and show another toy or even a small food treat. Most puppies will gladly give the toy to get the new toy or treat and at the same time will quickly learn the 'give' or 'release' command. Then, by repeating the entire sequence of events again, the game of fetch itself should soon be enough of a reward that food and toys will no longer be necessary to entice the puppy to give the toy. At the end of each fetch play session, have the puppy return the toy and give a toy or chew treat for the puppy to play with as a final reward for releasing the toy.

For older dogs that like to play their version of fetch, which is get the toy but not return it, playing fetch using two toys can often keep the game going. Throw one toy and as the dog returns to you, show him the other toy while saying, "drop it". Most dogs will drop the toy they have to get the one you have, at which point you can praise the dog and throw the other toy. Over time, many dogs will learn the "drop it" command and the need for two toys may diminish.

Sometimes when there is more than one dog in the home playing games, especially fetch, creates problems as both dogs rush toward the object. This can be avoided either by playing with one dog at a time or throwing two objects in opposite directions.

This client information sheet is based on material written by Debra Horwitz, DVM, Diplomate ACVB & Gary Landsberg, DVM, Diplomate ACVB

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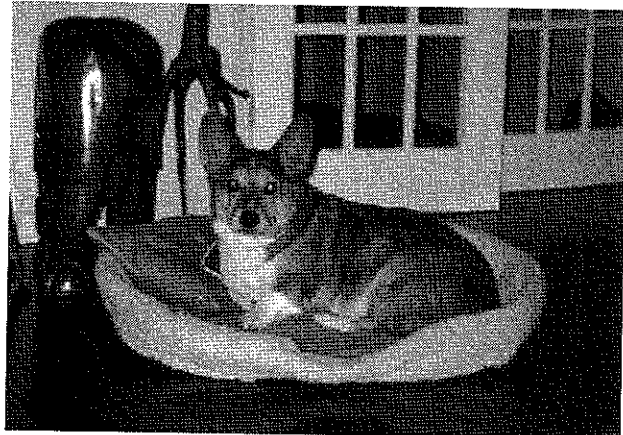
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TRAINING A DOG TO SETTLE OR RELAX

Why should I teach my dog to settle?

Many behavior problems have a component of fear, anxiety or excessive arousal so that retraining cannot begin until a calm, relaxed state can be achieved on cue. Training should focus on both the behavioral response (sit, down, walk, stay on your mat) as well as the emotional state (calm, relaxed). In fact, until you can get your pet to focus and relax on cue in the absence of the stimuli that evoke anxiety or arousal, it is not practical to attempt to get your pet to relax in the presence of these stimuli.

Once the dog has learned to settle on cue, it should be possible to begin exposure to gradually more intense stimuli (desensitization). The settle command could be used to achieve a focused response when the dog is overly excited or anxious such as when greeting family members, strangers or other animals. It can also be used when dogs become anxious as the owners prepare to depart or become overly excited when company arrives or when preparing for a walk.



How does settle training work?

Training your dog to respond to a verbal cue or command, or when it sees a visual cue, might be described as cue-response-reward or command-response-reward training. Generally the sequence is: to find a means of insuring that the pet will immediately and consistently exhibit the desired behavior, to reinforce the behavior, and then to add a cue prior to the behavior. Some of the behaviors that can be useful to place on command, especially for pets with behavior problems, are sit, down, heel, and go to your mat.

A good place to start is with a new set of cues that help both the pet and you to understand what behavior is desired. Rather than "sit", a "watch", "steady", "focus" or "chill" command might be used. Similarly, instead of "down" a "relax", "settle", or "SOFT" command might be considered (See our handout on SOFT exercises), while "follow" or "heel" should be used for a calm, loose leash walk, and "go to your mat" should mean go settle down in your bed.

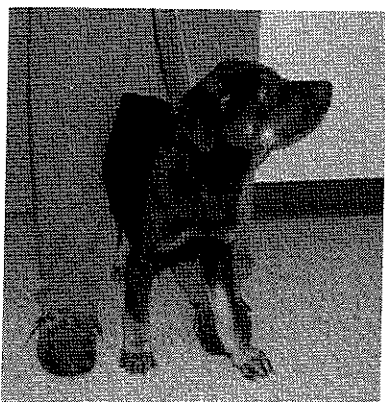
Training a dog to settle and focus should begin in an environment where your dog is calm and there are minimal or no distractions. Although the sequence for training is to a) give the command, b) get the desired response (using one of the techniques described below), and c) give clear and immediate reinforcement, training cannot begin until you have a means by which the target behavior can be reliably and consistently achieved.

How do I get started?

There are a variety of different methods by which the initial response can be achieved. In most cases food, a toy, or a visual target (which has been associated with favored food treats) can be used to lure the pet into the desired response. Alternately a physical device such as a leash and head halter can be used to physically prompt the dog to display the target behavior, along with immediate relaxation of tension as soon as the desired response is exhibited. (See our head halter handout). Another option is reinforce the desired behavior when it is exhibited spontaneously and then to add a cue word just prior to the response (this technique is often used when training a pet to eliminate on cue). A SOFT relaxation exercise (See our handout) and TTouch (See our handout) can also be used to achieve a relaxed response. Food, affection, a favored toy or a clicker (See our clicker training handout) can all serve as rewards if they are consistently given immediately following the behavior. These rewards should be withheld except for training (See our handout on learn to earn). Over time, the behavior can be gradually shaped for greater relaxation or longer duration.

How do I achieve a relaxed state?

Once the desired response is achieved, the goal of settle and relax training is to shape gradually more settled and relaxed responses. This can be accomplished by saving favored rewards exclusively for training and immediately reinforcing the pet for the desired response. With each subsequent training session, response of gradually longer duration and of gradually increasing relaxation should be reinforced. You will need to focus on facial expressions, body postures and breathing in order to determine the pet's level of relaxation, before giving rewards and proceeding to gradually more successful outcomes. Clicker training can be particularly effective for marking and reinforcing gradually more desirable increments of behavior. A leash and head halter can be used to insure success before release and reward. In order to achieve and maintain a calm response, the person doing the training must remain calm, relaxed and soft-spoken, and environment must be free of distractions. Remember, while you might be teaching the pet to sit/stay or down/stay, what you really want to emphasize is a relaxed emotional state.



How do I train these behaviors?

Teaching Steady / Maintaining a Loose Leash

- While you are standing still, give the puppy three to four feet of the leash. If the leash remains loose, say "steady", and occasionally give the puppy a food or social reward (positive reinforcement).
- When the puppy starts to walk away, the "steady" command is given and if the puppy remains at loose leash, then reward the behavior. If the puppy gets to the end of the leash and starts to tug and pull against the leash, a steady command is given, immediately followed by a slight tug on the leash by the owner to get the puppy's attention and stop it. Then, slack is returned to the leash.
- Upon compliance (loose leash) immediately give a food or social reward.
- After several repetitions, the puppy learns that it is rewarded for keeping the leash loose and that the word "steady" means "move to a relaxed leash position".

Practice a couple of times a day in the home with few distractions. As the puppy gets better, gradually add distractions and start working outside while maintaining a loose leash. Rewards should be given for maintaining a loose leash when walking by your side.

The steady command can then be used to stop tugging and pulling on leash while walking and to achieve a settled and controlled heel.

Teaching “Look”, “Watch me” or “Focus”

- Show your dog a favored toy or treat and then hide it behind your back. Have your back against the wall or be in a corner so the dog can't get behind you. An alternative method is to hide the treat in your closed hand in front of your chest in a line between your dog's eyes and your eyes. On the first attempt it would be acceptable to show the puppy the toy or treat.
- Say “look” or “focus” and as soon as your dog stops its attempt to get the treat and makes eye contact, use your reward or clicker and give the treat. Repeat to improve consistency and immediacy. It may be necessary to guide the dog by using your hand and bringing it up to your eyes. As the dog follows your hand, give the key word and reward eye contact.
- For some owners it might be more practical and desirable to reward the behavior only when the dog is in the sitting position.
- Gradually increase the amount of time you require eye contact to last and then start adding distractions in the background, like people playing, a fridge door opening, etc. Your dog ONLY gets rewarded after maintaining (e.g. not breaking) eye contact with you. Once the dog is consistent in giving the correct response even when there are distractions, go to other places (outside) and add mild distractions, such as another dog nearby or children playing. After each successful session gradually increase the distractions and work in busier environments.
- The goal is for your dog to maintain eye contact on cue with the key phrase for several minutes, regardless of the amount of distraction and background activity.
- Progress gradually to longer duration and increased relaxation before rewards are given (see below).

Teaching “Settle” in a down position

- Another exercise would be train the dog to lie down in a relaxed position, on its belly with both hind legs on the same side. This could be accomplished using food lure training, leash and head halter or a physical exercise such as SOFT (see our handout).
- Gradually progress to longer down stays in a variety of environments and then gradually increase the background noise and distractions.
- Progress gradually to longer duration and increased relaxation before rewards are given (see below).
- It may also be useful to teach “Settle” in a sit position for training while on walks

Teaching a settle location – e.g. go to your bed:

- Training the dog to settle indoors can sometimes be more easily accomplished by using a settle down area. The dog can be taught to “go to your mat or bed” or “go to your kennel” **where** it learns to stay calmly for favored rewards.
- Food lure training or target training can be used to achieve the initial response.
- Progress gradually to longer duration and increased relaxation before rewards are given (see below).

- At first, the owner may need to leave a leash attached so that the dog can be physically prompted (taken) to the bed or mat, to insure success and to demonstrate to the pet what behavior will result in a reward. Again, giving rewards at other times will delay learning (learn to earn).
- If the dog is also taught to sleep in this area and favored toys are kept in the area (and if a favored treat or social interaction is given when the pet voluntarily uses the area), it may soon learn to go to this area to relax on its own.

What other devices or techniques can be used to help me get my dog to relax on cue?

a) The head halter is an extremely effective tool for quickly and reliably achieving the initial behavior and for progressing rapidly to responses of longer duration and greater levels of relaxation. A pull on the leash and head halter, with or without the use of a cupped hand underneath the pet's chin can pull the dog into a sit with eye contact for release and positive reinforcement. With further training the eye contact can be maintained for progressively longer intervals before reinforcing. Similarly the leash and head halter can be used to achieve a settled down response, with hind legs over to one side. A settled down of increasingly longer duration and greater relaxation can then be shaped with rewards. With the leash and head halter, the down position can be maintained until the desired outcome is achieved either by keeping a foot on the leash, or by pulling gently upward as the pet begins to rise. The use of the head halter does not preclude the concurrent use of lure reward and clicker training techniques to insure a desirable outcome.

b) Physical Exercises.

Techniques that use physical contact can help to increase the enjoyment and decrease any fear associated with handling and restraint. In addition, they provide a means for achieving a relaxed state, which might then be used if the dog begins to get excited or aroused. While the physical contact and attention may provide sufficient reinforcement for some dogs, food treats can also be paired with handling to mark and reward the desirable response. TTouch and SOFT exercises are two physical / interactive exercises that are designed to help pets relax. While these are specific techniques, any physical handling that is associated with a positive outcome can be a valuable training exercise. In addition, by withholding affection when the pet solicits it, it increases its motivational value and usefulness as a reward. See our individual handouts that detail these exercises.

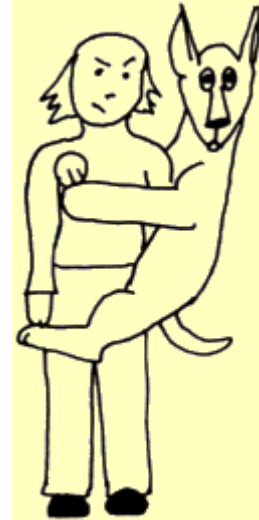
Physical exercises are intended to be used only with friendly, non-aggressive dogs. If you think your dog might become aggressive, do not begin without first discussing this with your behavior consultant. If your dog growls or attempts to bite, becomes fearful, or struggles excessively during these exercises, immediately discontinue them and seek the advice of a behaviorist or trainer.

Separation Anxiety

The Pet Health Care Library

The worst cases of separation anxiety present an unlivable disaster for the pet owner. The animal becomes destructive, soils the house, and vocalizes loudly and unabashedly. Since the behavior occurs almost exclusively when the pet is alone, there is nothing to stop him from creating a spectacular mess and annoying the neighbors every time the owner steps out. In milder cases the dog may show only panting, over-grooming, or pacing, which is not overtly destructive but clearly represents an unpleasant mental state for the patient.

- Often the dog begins the anxiety display when he perceives cues that the owner is about to leave (i.e. the owner puts on cologne for work, gets the car keys, takes a shower, makes coffee etc.).
- Separation anxiety problems can be precipitated by moving to a new home, loss of another pet in the home, or by prolonged separation from the owner. Prior to these events, the dog may have shown no separation anxiety whatsoever. Pets owned by single owners are 2.5 times as likely to have signs of separation anxiety as are pets living with more than one person.



Separation Anxiety vs. Boredom



It seems intuitively obvious that boredom and anxiety are opposite mental states but when one considers that dogs cannot talk, it becomes easier to see how one might misinterpret a dog's behavior. One may come home to find the front door scratched up beyond recognition or the sofa reduced to a pile of stuffing. Was he reacting to his fear of being alone? Was he bored and looking for fun? Was he frustrated because he did not know when to expect his owner to be home?

Separation anxiety is about two things: Separation and anxiety (or fear). Here are some clues that the problem is separation anxiety and not something else:

- The behavior occurs only when the pet is left alone or anticipates being left alone. (The dog who is destructive for fun may well be destructive when he is not left alone.)
- The pet is hyperattached to the owner. The hyperattached pet follows the owner from room to room and/or constantly wants to be held. Many people enjoy being loved by a dog to this extent but it is important to realize when some independence must be learned.
- Destruction is oriented against barriers such as doors (especially the door where the owner was last seen by the pet).
- Vocalization during the episode tends to be high pitched and in repeated yips. (This is a regression to a young puppy's distress call in the time of separation from its mother.)
- The episode begins in the first 30 minutes from the time the owner leaves.



Not every one of these signs must be fulfilled for the diagnosis of separation anxiety to be made but the point is that an effort should be made to determine if the dog is actually showing separation anxiety or if there is some other motivation at work.

Treatment

Living with a destructive animal is an on-going nightmare. One never knows what disaster will be waiting on the other side of the front door and the simple luxury of finding one's things where one left them becomes an impossible dream. It would be wonderful if one could simply give the dog a pill and solve the problem; unfortunately, training is the primary focus of solving separation anxiety and medication is an adjunct. Often the owner needs as much training as the dog.

Step One: Discourage Hyperattachment

Dogs will often solicit attention from their owners. Resist the temptation of petting the dog with separation anxiety when approached for play or contact. Be aloof when greeted upon arriving home. Instead the human should be the initiator of contact with the dog.

Do not allow the dog to settle down in close proximity (within one yard) of where the owner is settling down. Arrange objects on the bed or sofa or on the floor so that the dog must settle at a greater distance. If possible, verbally reward the dog for settling at a distance (though take care as continued attention may be seen by the dog as an invitation to approach which is not what we want.) If the dog normally sleeps on the owner's bed, provide the dog with his own bed. One may need to start with the dog bed at the foot of the human bed before ultimately the dog bed is moved to the floor or even outside the room.

If there are other people in the home besides the primary dog caretaker, try to divide the care giving among the different people so that the dog is not as dependent on one person.

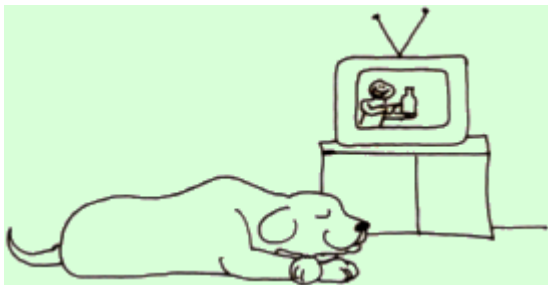
Encourage independent play by using interactive toys that do not require human participation (like a Kong toy containing a food reward).

Step Two: Relaxation During Separation

It is also important to create a positive environment in the owner's absence. There are several ways this might be achieved.

Provide a special treat (food, toy or both) only available when the pet is left alone. Do not forget to remove the item when you return home.

The D.A.P. (dog appeasement pheromone) diffuser is a plug-in scent-releasing device. The material released is a genetically engineered pheromone normally secreted by mother dogs to their puppies as a message telling them to relax and that everything is all right. The pheromone is odorless to humans. A pump spray is also available but the diffuser continuously releases its message to hopefully keep the anxious dog calm. More recently, a D.A.P. pheromone collar has become available so that the dog simply carries the biochemical message around with him.



Leave the TV or radio on. The dog will not be fooled into thinking that someone is home; the point is to recreate a sense of cozy relaxation. Most people at home relax while listening to the radio or watching TV and the dog often sits in the room relaxed, too. The sound of the broadcast becomes a classically conditioned cue to the dog and may be helpful in creating a sense of comfort.

Step Three: Desensitization to Separation

Dogs readily learn the cues that indicate that the owner will be leaving the house soon. It is helpful to uncouple these cues from the actual leaving. At random times, the owner can go through some of the rituals of leaving: put on cologne, shower, wear work clothes, taking the car keys, even going outside and locking the door - but then coming in again. This helps the dog to remain relaxed when he hears or sees these cues at the times when the owner is actually leaving. It is important to repeat these cues so many times daily that they become meaningless to the dog.

Do not punish the dog for behavior demonstrated in fear.

This usually only leads to more fear or more anxiety. Second, unless the animal is actually in the process of performing the behavior one wishes to discourage, the dog will not understand what behavior is being punished.

Drugs

Currently [clomipramine](#) and [fluoxetine](#) are the only FDA-approved drugs for the treatment of separation anxiety in the dog; however, other human anti-anxiety medications have a long history of use for this purpose.



Clomipramine, a tricyclic anti-anxiety drug so named because of its chemical structure, works by increasing levels of serotonin in the brain. Serotonin is a neurotransmitter associated with pleasant, relaxed sensations. When serotonin levels are high, we fall happily and cozily asleep. Serotonin is also involved with the pleasant sensations associated with eating chocolate, sun-bathing, and falling in love. Problems with reduced serotonin function can lead to anxiety, obsession, and mood disorders.

Clomipramine may be used once or twice a day. Often a lower dose is started, gradually working up to a higher dose. Some owners report good effect right away but it more commonly takes several weeks (4-6 weeks) for a steady blood level to be achieved.

This drug or any other used is meant as a supplement to training and cannot be expected to work without proper behavior management.

For more details on this medication, see manufacturer [Novartis Animal Health's](#) information.

Fluoxetine, more commonly known by its brand name Prozac, more recently entered the veterinary market for canine separation anxiety. It also acts by increasing serotonin levels in the brain. It is usually given once or twice daily in combination with behavior management as described above. Elanco, the company that manufactures veterinary fluoxetine under the brand name Reconcile, has trademarked a training program they call B.O.N.D. As with clomipramine, it takes several weeks to expect to see a meaningful change, although some dogs respond more quickly.

Learn more details on [Reconcile](#).

If actual panic is occurring and simply must be stopped, the benzodiazepine class of tranquilizers is appropriate. Sometimes these medications are initially combined with one of the above anti-anxiety medications to help control the situation in the short term. [Diazepam](#), more commonly known as Valium, might be useful in such a situation but the problem is that it will not last long enough to cover several hours of owner-pet separation. [Alprazolam](#) (Xanax, a similar drug that lasts longer, may be more appropriate in this situation. Both these drugs are controlled, meaning certain paper work must be filed with the government in order to prescribe them. There may be a limit on the number of tablets that can be obtained depending on local laws.

Behavior is an area that not all veterinarians are comfortable treating. Discuss with your veterinarian whether referral to a behavior specialist would be best for you and your pet. [Find a veterinary behavior specialist](#) in your area.

November 3, 2009

Separation Anxiety

The Humane Society of the United States

Dogs with separation anxiety exhibit distress and behavior problems when they're left alone. The most common behaviors include:



Digging and scratching at doors or windows in an attempt to reunite with their owners

Destructive chewing

Howling, barking, and whining

Urination and defecation (even with otherwise housetrained dogs)

Is it separation anxiety?

If most, or all, of the following statements are true about your dog, he may have a separation anxiety problem:

The behavior occurs primarily when he's left alone and typically begins soon after you leave.

He follows you from room to room whenever you're home.

He displays effusive, frantic greeting behaviors.

The behavior occurs whether he's left alone for short or long periods.

He reacts with excitement, depression, or anxiety to your preparations to leave the house.

[Help save a life: Pledge to adopt your next pet](#)

What causes separation anxiety

It's not fully understood why some dogs suffer from separation anxiety and others don't. But it's important to realize that the destruction and house soiling that often occur with separation anxiety are part of a panic response. Your dog isn't trying to punish you for leaving him alone.

Following are some common scenarios that can trigger separation anxiety:

A dog accustomed to constant human companionship is left alone for the first time.

A dog suffers a traumatic event (from his viewpoint), such as time at a shelter or boarding kennel.

There's a change in the family's routine or structure or the loss of a family member or other pet.

How to treat minor separation anxiety

Don't make a big deal out of arrivals and departures. For example, when you arrive home, ignore your dog for the first few minutes then calmly pet him. Leave your dog with an article of clothing that smells like you, such as an old T-shirt that you've slept in recently.

Establish a safety cue—a word or action that you use every time you leave that tells your dog you'll be back.

Consider using an over-the-counter calming product that may reduce fearfulness in dogs.

How to handle a more severe problem

Use the techniques outlined above along with desensitization training. Teach your dog the sit-stay and down-stay commands using positive reinforcement. This training will help him learn that he can remain calmly and happily in one place while you go to another room.

Create a "safe place" to limit your dog's ability to be destructive. A safe place should:

Confine loosely rather than strictly (a room with a window and distractions rather than total isolation)

Contain busy toys for distraction

Have dirty laundry to lend a calming olfactory cue or other safety cues.

What to do in the meantime

It can take time for your dog to unlearn his panic response to your departures. To help you and your dog cope in the short term, consider the following interim solutions:

Ask your veterinarian about drug therapy. A good anti-anxiety drug shouldn't sedate your dog but simply reduce his overall anxiety.

Take your dog to a doggie day care facility or kennel when you have to be away.

Leave your dog with a friend, family member, or neighbor when you're away.

Take your dog to work with you, if possible.

What won't help

Punishment. Punishment isn't effective for treating separation anxiety and can make the situation worse. The destruction and house soiling that often occur with separation anxiety aren't your dog's revenge for being left alone: they're part of a panic response.

Another dog. Getting your dog a companion usually doesn't help an anxious dog because his anxiety is the result of his separation from you, not just the result of being alone.

Crating. Your dog will still engage in anxiety responses inside a crate, and he may urinate, defecate, howl, or even injure himself in an attempt to escape. Instead, create other kinds of "safe places" as described above.

Radio/TV noise. Leaving the radio or television on won't help (unless the radio or TV is used as a safety cue).

Obedience training. While formal training is always a good idea, separation anxiety isn't the result of disobedience or lack of training; therefore, it won't help this particular issue.

Consult a professional animal behavior specialist for assistance in resolving your dog's issues.