



Unwanted Behaviour in dogs

Bad behaviour, or unwanted behaviour is one of the most common questions we have in classes.

Traditionally its been common to advise people to ignore some of these unwanted behaviours and reward desirable behaviour. To some extent, this method can have its advantages, though things are always changing. A few points on this topic.

Firstly, why would we ignore some bad behaviour? The main reason is so that it's not reinforced (or rewarded). If a behaviour is reinforced (rewarded) its more likely to occur again.

If a dog is jumping up, its usually because it is trying to solicit attention in some way or obtain social contact. The most common reactions to jumping up are: Telling the dog off (and in the process giving the dog attention. Or causing fear and stress). Another reaction might be to give the dog attention or a pat when they jump up (and therefore strongly reinforcing the behaviour). Or of course ignoring the behaviour (so not providing any attention to the dog, or giving them a reinforcement).

Of course the behaviour may (& probably will) eventually stop if it is ignored (and not reinforced in any way). Though keep in mind behaviour like this may get worse before they get better; If a dog has previously received attention for bad behaviour (such as jumping up, stealing items, digging holes etc) then it may get worse before it gets better as the dog may try harder (to solicit your attention).

So in theory ignoring the behaviour can work IF you are patient and consistent. Though the faster way to make progress on solving this problem is to help or show the dog what they get attention for. So if its jumping up then give them attention for 4 feet on the ground! If its stealing items give them attention for playing with and picking up their toys....

You will need to set up the dog's environment to enable this to happen. This may mean putting the dog on the lead or using a barrier when visitors come over. As the dog eventually learns what behaviours are reinforced (rewarded) the dog will offer those behaviours more and more. Eventually you wont need the barrier or lead when they offer behaviour like a calm stand or sit for attention.

If its stealing items such as shoes, clothing or the kids toys then for a while you need to pack away those items (so they don't get attention for taking them) and put out their own toys and items to grab, carry and chew. Slowly introduce your items back into the mix and train your dog that their toys are more exciting and that you will engage in play (or even chasey if you wish) for interaction with their toys.



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And lastly the example of digging; maybe set up a digging pit for them and give them attention for using it and encourage them to use it by playing toys and treats in there. Or instead make sure your dog is well exercised and given toys to chew on so you then allow them to expend energy on those things rather than digging, and you reinforce that by interacting and giving your dog attention for this instead. Keep in mind not all behaviours are so simple and have the same cause. If your dog is demonstrating extreme, persistent, dangerous or harmful behaviour its important to seek expert advice.

Dogs do what works for them; this means if they are reinforced some way then they are likely to repeat the behaviour.

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