



NEW DOG OWNER TRAINING PROGRAM

DEMOLITION DOGS

This information is intended as a general guide only

Washing pulled off the line?
Favorite plants shredded?
Shoes with custom made tooth marks?

In the middle of the mayhem is a very "guilty looking" dog. You think he obviously knows he's done something wrong because he "looks" guilty, his ears are down and his tail is between his legs.

Guess what? He is not showing signs of guilt or defiance; he is reacting to your body language, tone of voice and obvious distress. From the dog's point of view he has just been playing with the lovely things, that have your scent and you left for his amusement. When you turn up you are displaying abnormally aggressive behaviour and it seems to be directed at him. The dog has no idea why you are angry at him, he only knows he needs to try and make you happy, so he grovels and jumps and licks to try to appease you.

Why does my dog destroy things?

Destructive behaviour can be the result of:

- Lack of training
- Boredom
- Attention seeking
- Playtime enthusiasm
- Health Problems
- Hunger/thirst/lack of shelter

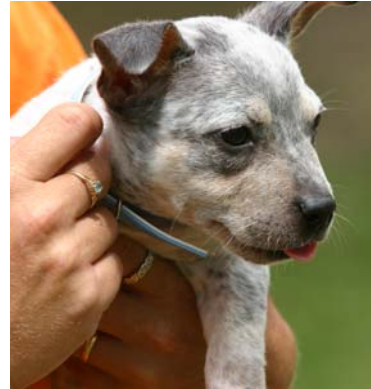


Lack of training

It is unfair to complain about destructive behaviour if you have not taught your dog what is, and what is not, appropriate to play with. He will not know the difference between your best shoes, and the old sandshoe you gave him to chew on. Just as a child doesn't know the difference between not touching grandma's doll collection when they have dolls as play things.

Some management ideas:

- Teach and show your dog what things he can play with.
- If he picks up something that belongs to you, make sure you have a tasty treat handy and tell "leave" and present the treat. He will spit the item and take the treat. Then give him something he can play with, a toy or a dog biscuit.
- Make it clear by praising him when he interacts with his own toys or chew toys. Remember that dogs may not know how to play with toys, so make them interesting by playing with the dog to get his attention on the toy.
- Restrict the dog's unsupervised access to those items that are dangerous or which he is not allowed to play with and supervise him while training him that those items must not be touched.
- Provide alternatives - if the dog has nothing to interact with he will look for things to amuse himself. Praise him whenever he ignores "banned" objects.
- Clear your yard and house of things that are at puppy level. Good excuse for a spring clean! Leave things about that he is allowed to play with.
- Teach your dog to be confined to areas such as a pen or particular room. He needs to have all the things he needs to be comfortable, food, water, toys and a bed. In this way he can be comfortably confined while left unsupervised.



Boredom

Boredom is the result of insufficient mental and physical stimulation. Just like young children, dogs can suffer boredom if their environment lacks stimulation and this leads to inappropriate behaviour.

Even a big back yard can be a large prison if he has all day, every day to get to know every inch of it. Your dog can not relieve his boredom by reading a book, flicking on the television or visiting a friend. If the environment you provide the dog lacks interesting things and variety he will start to look for things to entertain himself. To enrich your dogs environment refer to ideas in the "Dog Friendly Back Yards" handout.



Attention seeking

Dogs are social animals and enjoy company and they are not overly content when left alone a lot. Your dog may find that playing with your favourite items gets him some of your attention - even if it is the wrong attention! Your dog will soon learn if he plays with your things he gets your attention.

If you pay little attention to your dog he will try any possible way to get you to notice him. Even yelling and chasing him is better, in his mind, to getting no attention at all.

Management ideas for attention seeking:

The main issue is to pay more attention to the dog. This attention can take the form of training or appropriate play.

Try and anticipate the times he is about to gain your attention and divert him first by doing a short training session or giving him a toy he hasn't had recently.

Your dog needs daily interact with you to fulfill his social needs and you need to put aside some time to do this.

If he is a yard dog you need to go out and interact with him, play with a toy, do some training, take him for a walk, groom him or just sit and pat him.



Anxiety

Does your dog follow you everywhere you go in the house? Does he complain when shut away from you?

If your dog is too dependent on you this can lead to anxiety when you are away. This type of anxiety can cause the dog to be destructive to relieve his anxiety. This can be a problem with dogs that have been abandoned or gone through the trauma of being left at a shelter. They fear that you will also abandon them.

If this problem is severe you will need to consult a veterinary behaviour expert to develop a program for you and your dog.



Management ideas to prevent anxiety:

- When you are going to be away from home make sure the dog has plenty of doggy enrichment to keep him occupied.
- Prepare a meal and give him this as you leave. Better still make him up a Kong or food dispenser as this will keep him busy for longer.
- Leave on a TV or radio to give the impression of company.
- Gradually get your dog used to being separated from you for an increasing length of time while you are at home. Put his bed in an area where he can see you moving about and install a child's door barrier to stop him from following you.
- Keep your arrivals and departures very low key - don't make a big fuss at these times.

- Reward the dog, calmly, when he is quiet and relaxed and/or playing with appropriate items.



Management ideas for playtime enthusiasm:

- The main point here is to reward the dog for calm, quiet behaviour and stop play if he becomes destructive.
- If he doesn't stop put the toy away and try again later.
- Reward him with a treat when he brings toys back to you. Don't try and pull it off him as this encourages him to try and keep it for himself.
- Keep your games to reasonable level of excitement; don't let them escalate to high intensity. Play is about interaction not over excitement.
- Make training part of your play sessions, teach him to drop or give his toys to you. This has to be done with treats as he has no reason to give up his play thing for no reward.
- Train him to settle during play session by teaching "sit" and "down".
- Tug games should be kept to a minimum and children should never be encouraged to play tug with dogs.



Health problems:

If the dog suffers from fleas, skin allergy, or has a dental problem this could make him irritable and more likely to be destructive. If he has fleas or an allergy he may scratch on his bed causing the bedding to tear and become a target for the dog's attention. Dental problems can cause the dog to chew on things to relieve the tension and pain in his mouth.

Management of health issues:

This problem has a very obvious answer - make sure your dog is in good health, free of fleas and is regularly checked by a veterinarian.



Hunger/Thirst/ Shelter:

Many behaviour issues can start if your dog is not given the basic requirements for normal comfortable living conditions. He requires appropriate food, plenty of clean water, appropriate shelter from the heat, cold and extreme weather conditions and needs appropriate social contact.

It is your responsibility as his care giver to make sure he has these things.

