

Your complete guide to natural dog care and training

Whole Dog Journal™



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On page 10. Losing a dog to a medical mistake is agonizing – for the owner and the veterinary staff responsible.



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Away From Me

Absence absolutely does make the heart grow fonder, but it can also teach you a few things about your dogs.

Recently, I went on a vacation – a dog-free vacation. It was strange to not pet dogs for a week – and I kept having that startling sensation that I had forgotten to feed them – but it was interesting to receive reports from the people who were taking care of mine.

Nine-year-old Otto, shown here with me, stayed at my sister's house. Otto is tired of other dogs, having been present for the comings and goings of countless foster dogs and puppies over the past few years, and even though my sister has four small dogs, I thought her house would be the best spot for him. She and her husband love dogs and pamper them. Their dogs sleep on the bed with them, there are dog toys literally everywhere, and my sister, a chef, is pretty liberal with the treats. I didn't think he'd mind hanging out with her dogs, since one is quite old and has dementia (so he doesn't really interact with the other dogs in a meaningful way), and two of the others are middle-aged females who socialize on their terms only. I thought they'd all just mind their own business.

The funny thing is, Otto formed a solid "bromance" with my sister's fourth dog, a scruffy, 10-pound terrier-mix who looks a little like a blond Otto "Mini-Me." Lucky is a playful, social dog, maybe two or three years old. My sister says that Lucky and Otto played "chase me" and wrestling games on and off all day! Otto hasn't played with any dogs in my home for ages. He's not the least bit interested in manner-less puppies, and despises rude, floppy adolescents – and these are the two types I tend to foster! Clearly, I haven't given him enough opportunities to socialize with other adult dogs who have good canine manners, something I'll try to remedy with Lucky play dates in the future.

I sent my big, floppy adolescent Lab/bully-breed-mix, Woody, to stay with my young adult son, who has an office job where he is allowed to bring his dog to work. Ordinarily, this is his own well-behaved, calm Black and Tan Coonhound, Cole, but for his week of dog-sitting, he brought Woody to work – with mixed results.

Woody continues to exhibit signs of anxiety with new people and dogs – when he's at a distance from them. His hair goes up, and he emits low growls – until he has an opportunity to get close to someone (human or canine). The *instant* he gets close enough to greet someone, he immediately transforms into a wiggly, goofy, friendly dog. But it's understandably hard to convince anyone that the growly, scary-looking dog is actually a big, friendly doofus. My son managed it with his co-workers, largely on the strength of their faith in him as a dog-handler (as evidenced by Cole's impeccable behavior), but, as my son described it in his dry way, "It wasn't ideal." I've been working on this, but Woody and I are about to start work on it in a *big* way.

Get ready for super-social school, Woody!



NK



Help Your Pup Grow Social

It's a lot of work to arrange for and manage your puppy's social life, but worth every minute, since it can have a positive – or negative – influence on the rest of his interactions, for life!

One of the neatest things about puppies is that they are little sponges! They soak up the world around them, and when they feel safe, they are curious and engaged with life. We all know that socializing puppies – the process of getting them accustomed to the world around them – is critical to a pup's comfort and happiness later in life. Socialization can help puppies:

- Learn how to get along with other dogs and not be afraid of people.
- Get accustomed to handling – a skill that can help with grooming, vet visits and more.
- Learn to deal with a little bit of excitement and stress without falling apart.
- Learn that the world is safe, which can reduce fearful and aggressive behaviors.

Socializing is more than just getting your pup out and about and having him meet lots of people and animals. The way a puppy is socialized is just as important. It is the quality of the exposure that counts (not the quantity!). Your pup doesn't need to have prolonged or close contact with new things or people. He just needs to have easy, happy experiences. The more relaxed your pup is, the better.

KEEP IT FUN!

Help your pup be relaxed and calm. For a younger pup, hold him in your arms if that is calming. Talk to him in soft and gentle tones. Give him treats. Keep him a little bit away from



things so he can watch from a comfortable distance until he is ready to explore. Make sure all exposures and introductions happen on puppy time – that is, when your pup wants to engage.

How do you know if your pup wants to explore something new, meet a new person, or play with another pup? Just watch your pup and you will see. If your pup is curious and moving towards the person, animal, or thing, your pup may be ready to engage.

If your pup is cautious, wait. Let him watch from a distance. Pups don't have to interact with everything and everyone during socialization. Just being in the world, or hearing noises, or seeing people or animals can help them become familiar.

If your pup is overexcited to the point of being frenetic, he may also be lacking confidence or even a little scared. Try to help your pup build confidence by keeping greetings brief,

Predictably friendly adult dogs are some of your most valuable allies in the quest for well-socialized puppies.

giving your pup treats, or changing how people or other animals are interacting. For example, if your pup is a little too excited greeting people, have people sit down and let your pup go up to them. Or try moving your pup away and let him watch until he shows more confidence.

What if your pup tucks her tail, tries to move away, or perhaps barks or cries? Please, please, *please* move your puppy away from whatever scares her. This is critical. Making a puppy stay near something or someone that scares her has the potential to backfire and create a real and lasting fear. It is *not* a good idea to throw a pup into the deep end, metaphorically speaking. Better to move your pup away, let her experience the scary stimulus from a distance, and give her some chicken or other tasty treats. Wait for her to be ready to explore comfortably.

Puppies do go through fear periods – developmental phases when the world is just a little more overwhelming. If your pup seems suddenly scared of more things than he was previously, take a step back from socialization and provide him with comfort, fun things to do, and gentle experiences. Fear periods often pass in one to two weeks.

PEOPLE, DOGS, PLACES, AND THINGS

One of the things I've discovered in my puppy classes is that many people assume socialization is simply about getting your dog around lots of people to be petted and plenty of dogs to play with. This can be a *piece* of the socialization package, but remember that the goal of socialization is to get your pup accustomed to and comfortable with the world around him.

Puppies need to be exposed *in a pleasant way* to:

- People, including infants, toddlers, older kids, teens, adults, older people; men and women; people of different ethnicities; big and small people; people with sunglasses, hoods, hats, backpacks, and umbrellas; people in uniforms; people with canes, crutches, or in wheelchairs.
- People doing things such as running, throwing balls, kneeling down to garden, doing yoga or tai chi, standing on chairs or ladders, using tools and pushing brooms, carrying bags and boxes.
- Animals such as dogs, cats, horses,

chickens, goats, and any other animal your dog may come into contact with on a regular basis.

- Things that move, such as bicycles, skateboards, running kids, kites, motorcycles, cars, trucks, fire engines, and running animals.
- New places such as your car, the veterinarian's office, parks, beaches, shopping areas, sidewalks with cars going by, areas where you might walk or hike or vacation, other people's houses, and pet stores.
- Noises that come with everyday life such as blow dryers, kitchen appliances, vacuums, doorbells, walk-sign beeps, trucks backing up, neighbors in their yards, kids yelling, babies crying, wind and storm noises, and fireworks.
- Different surfaces, such as grass, gravel, pavement, carpet, shiny floors, mulch, sand, wet surfaces outside, and the bathtub.
- Handling (such as touching for vet visits, grooming, patting heads, and even hugging) and invasive interactions, such as people invading their space, taking things from them, and getting into their food.
- Other things your dog might experience in your daily life, such as rain and wind, people with surfboards, boats, tall buildings, or wild animals.

Of course this is only a partial list; there's no way to expose your pup to *all* of these things (boy, wouldn't that be overwhelming and exhausting!). Instead, try to accomplish a few from each category. Learning that new and different things are good can help reduce the chance that your pup will get scared or spooked later in life.

Also, keep in mind that your pup does not need to be socially intimate with *every* person or dog he runs across. Exposure alone is important. Puppies also need to learn to be around people, animals and

Adolescence and Beyond

Socialization is a process that starts as soon as a pup is born, and most experts now believe that the first 12 to 16 weeks are the most important. Does that mean that socialization is done when your pup hits 12 weeks? On the contrary, it is very important to continue with positive social experiences, exposure to new things, and exploration of the world through your pup's adolescence and into adulthood. If you stop exposing your puppy to new experiences after puppy class, your pup may gradually become less confident in the world and new behavior problems may develop.

Ongoing, positive experiences with people, dogs, places, and new things can help your good early socialization stick for life.



things that they do *not* get to interact with, too.

BEFORE OR AFTER VACCINES?

The American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior and other experts in the field are now very clear that early socialization – *before* puppies have their full set of vaccines – is very important for the long-term wellbeing of the pup. Equally important however is keeping your puppy safe from diseases such as parvovirus and distemper. Following these guidelines can help you do both.

- Work closely with your vet to make sure your pup is on an appropriate vaccine schedule. Wait until seven days after your pup's first set of vaccines to explore the world.
- Avoid places where dogs of unknown vaccine history might have been such as dog parks, beaches, and neighborhood parks.
- Allow your puppy to socialize and play with other puppies who are also following a vaccine schedule. Your pup may also enjoy playing with puppy-friendly adult dogs who are healthy and vaccinated.
- Take your puppy to your vet right away if she appears to feel unwell.

WHAT SOCIALIZATION CAN AND CANNOT DO

Each puppy has his or her own genetic makeup. Genetics influence everything from how tall a puppy will be to how she will react to the world around her. Sociability, startle responses, fearfulness, and excitability may all be part of a genetic package.

Socialization cannot change genetics. But the current belief is that the expression of those genetics may have some flexibility and this is where socialization can help. Socialization can help your puppy be as comfortable, confident, and happy as possible.

In addition, socialization generally is not enough to help a puppy or dog overcome a traumatic event. Careful

Ways to Safely Socialize BEFORE Your Pup Is Fully Immunized

Puppies are vaccinated several times, several weeks apart, until they are old enough to ensure that their bodies have had ample opportunity to develop immunity to the diseases for which they have been vaccinated. Until your vet (or better yet, a vaccine titer test) confirms that your puppy is fully immunized, socialize him safely with the following methods:

- ✓ **Invite friends to your home.** Children, adults, men, women, the UPS driver, the gardeners – have your pup see and experience these people in and around your home.
- ✓ **Take your pup to a friend's house.** Just going into a new environment will offer your puppy lots of new experiences.
- ✓ **Invite your friends' healthy, vaccinated, and puppy-friendly dogs over for a play date.** Playing with other dogs is important for puppies' social development and to learn not to bite hard in play.
- ✓ **Take your pup on a walk in a stroller, wagon, or sling.** Just don't allow him to walk places where there might be feces or urine from other animals.
- ✓ **Take a large blanket to the park.** Let your pup watch the world go by on the safety of the blanket.
- ✓ **Take your pup for car rides.** Help him get used to the motion on short rides to the store or even just around the block.
- ✓ **Stop by your vet's office and get your pup weighed.** Take along plenty of treats to make it a super-great experience.
- ✓ **Visit businesses that welcome dogs or a sidewalk café.** Carry your pup in – or in the case of a cafe, set him up on a mat – and let him take in the sights and smells.
- ✓ **Consider taking a puppy class.** A well-run puppy class will help you socialize your pup to things outside of your home while your pup is also getting some foundation training. Make sure disinfectants are used to clean waste in your puppy class, and that it's verified that all puppies in the class have been vaccinated.

socialization can help when it is done along with behavior modification, training, and/or medical intervention.

Socialization is showing your dog the world he will live in. It is teaching him that his world will be safe. It is helping your puppy understand that you will always be on his side and that you are a trustworthy partner. Know who your puppy is and what his or her

specific needs are. Socializing carefully and with those needs in mind will help your pup become the best he can be. And you can both have fun doing it! 🐾

Mardi Richmond is a trainer and the owner of Good Dog Santa Cruz, in Santa Cruz, CA. She lives with her wife and her red Heeler, Chance. Working with puppies is the best part of her day!



Bite Inhibition

A dog's ability or tendency to exquisitely control the pressure of his teeth develops when he's just a pup. Learn how to help your puppy acquire this valuable skill.



Allowing your puppy to mouth you is the best way to teach him how to do it – only with a carefully modulated, “soft” bite. Puppies who learn this at a young age usually mature into dogs who don't cause serious injuries when (or if) they ever do bite “for real” – say, as a reflex when someone accidentally steps on them.

Some puppies have a naturally soft bite; some joyfully shred flesh without a hint of malice as they engage in normal interactions with the humans who care for them.

It's a commonly accepted theory that puppies who control the strength of their bite in play (known as bite inhibition) are more likely to also inhibit their bite on occasions that may arise throughout their lives if/when they feel compelled to bite for *real* – not just in play. Adult dogs who have good bite inhibition, the theory suggests, will thus inflict far less damage if a bite does occur.

So, what determines how hard a puppy will bite? And, more importantly, is there anything you can do to help him develop a harmlessly “soft” bite?

CAUSES OF HARD BITING

There are a number of things that may contribute to the propensity of a dog to bite down hard when he bites:

- **Genetics.** As with most behaviors, there's a good chance that the amount of pressure a dog applies when he bites is at least partly due to a genetic propensity for hard or soft biting. (But don't despair over what hard-mouthed genes your dog may have inherited; it's also true that, as with most behaviors, the natural strength of a puppy's bite can be modified, at least to some degree. And the more chances a pup has to practice soft biting, the easier it becomes to modify it.)

- **Early experience.** In the first few weeks of life, a puppy learns how and why to control the pressure of his teeth. If he bites too hard while nursing, Mom might just get up and walk away, taking the milk bar with her. In behavioral terms, we'd call this negative punishment – his behavior made the good stuff go away. If he bites too hard while playing, his siblings are likely to quit playing with him. Many canine behavior professionals agree that orphaned puppies and those who are removed from their litters too early (prior to the age of eight weeks) are far more likely to have poor bite inhibition than those who learn mannerly mouth behavior through normal puppy social experiences.

- **Stress and/or Excitement.** Stress and excitement create tension, and that tension can often be felt in the mouth. Even a calm dog with a soft bite may increase the pressure of his bite when he is stressed (you can feel it when you feed him a treat). For a dog who already has a hard bite, the pain of feeding him a treat when he's stressed can be nearly unbearable.

THE FOUR R'S OF TEACHING PUPPY BITE INHIBITION

Here are four R's – the most effective steps for building your puppy's bite inhibition:

- 1 **REMOVE.** When your puppy bites hard enough to cause you pain, say, “Ouch” in a calm voice, gently remove your body part from

his mouth, and take your attention away from him for two to five seconds. You're using negative punishment, just like his mom and littermates. If he continues to grab at you when you remove your attention, put yourself on the other side of a baby gate or exercise pen. Re-engage only when he's calm.

2 REPEAT. Puppies (and adult dogs) learn through repetition. It will take time – and many repetitions of Step 1, “Remove” – for your pup to learn to voluntarily control his bite pressure. Puppies have a strong need to bite and chew, so at first, “ouch and remove” only if he bites hard enough to hurt you. Softer bites are acceptable for now. If you try to stop *all* his biting at once, you'll both become frustrated. Look for just a small decrease in his bite pressure at first.

When he voluntarily inhibits his bite a little – enough so that it doesn't hurt – you can then start responding with “ouch and remove” for slightly softer bites, until you have eventually shaped him not to bite at all. By the time he's six to eight months old, he should have learned not to put his mouth on humans, unless you choose to teach him to mouth gently on cue.

3 REINFORCE. Like all dogs (and humans), your pup wants good stuff to stick around. When he discovers that biting hard makes you (good stuff) go away, he will decrease the pressure of his bite, and eventually stop biting hard.

This works especially well if you remember to reinforce him with your attention when he bites gently. It works even better if you use a reward marker when he uses appropriate mouth pressure. Given that your hands are probably full of puppy at that particular moment, you might choose use a verbal marker followed by praise to let him know he's doing well. “Yes!” marks the soft-mouth moment, followed by calm “Good puppy!” praise to let him know he's wonderful. (If you praise too enthusiastically you may get him excited and cause him to increase his bite pressure again.)

4 REDIRECT. It's always a good idea to have soft toys handy to occupy your pup's teeth when he's in a persistent biting mood. If you know he's in high-energy, hard-bite mode, arm yourself with a few soft toys and offer them before your hands are punctured. If he's already made contact, or you're working on repetitions of “Remove,” reinforce appropriate softer bites occasionally with a favorite toy.

If there are children in the home with a mouthy puppy, it's imperative that you arm them with soft toys and have toys easily available in every room of the house, so they can protect themselves by redirecting puppy teeth rather than running away and screaming – a game that most bitey pups find highly reinforcing.

DON'T PUNISH

It may seem simpler, quicker and easier to suppress a puppy's hard biting by punishing him when he bites too hard. However, by doing so, you may teach him to fear you, and he may aggress back at you, creating a bigger behavior problem – *and* you haven't taught him bite inhibition. If and when that moment comes where he really *does* feel compelled to bite someone, he's likely to revert to his previous behavior and bite hard, rather than offering the inhibited bite you *could have* taught him. Helping him learn to modulate his bite, instead, will pay lifelong dividends. 🐾

Author Pat Miller, CBCC-KA, CPDT-KA, is WDJ's Training Editor. See page 24 for more information.

Don't do *any* of these things

Over the years, I've cringed at a variety of tactics that I've seen or heard people suggesting for modifying puppy-mouthing. Here are some of the worst – things you *don't* want to do:

- ✓ Alpha-rolls. You are likely to elicit a whole lot more biting – truly aggressive biting – as your frightened pup tries to defend himself. *Don't do it.* (See “Biscuits Not Rolls,” WDJ July 2006.)
- ✓ Hold his mouth closed, push your fist down his throat, push his lip between his teeth so he bites himself, or bite him back. All of these are bad ideas. What self-respecting puppy wouldn't struggle and try to bite *harder* with inappropriate restraint? All the while, you're giving your pup a bad association with your hands near his face, which isn't going to help with grooming, tooth-brushing, mouth exams, or even petting. *Don't do it.*
- ✓ Give a high-pitched yelp. This one might surprise you. It's in a different category from the inappropriate suggestions above, and it's often suggested by positive trainers. The theory is that the high-pitched yelp sounds like a puppy in pain, communicating to your young dog in a language he understands. But it's a fallacy to think our feeble attempt to speak “puppy” might communicate the same message as a *real* puppy yelp – like trying to speak a foreign language by mimicking what we think the sounds are, without actually knowing any of the words. In my experience, the yelp is as likely to incite an excited biting puppy to a higher level of arousal (and harder biting) as it is to tell him he bit you too hard and he should soften his mouth. *Don't do it.* A calm “Ouch” sends a much more consistent, useful and universal message, which is simply, “That behavior makes the good stuff go away.”



Survival Strategies for Puppy Biting

How to get past this developmental phase in one piece.

Puppies! Who doesn't love 'em? They're cute, cuddly, and silly. They look like little angels when they sleep, which is often. When they're awake, they spend all their time exploring and learning about the world around them. We marvel at their curiosity and playfulness – until we experience The Teeth.

Puppies explore with their mouths, which nature has equipped with rows of teeny-tiny hole-punchers. It's no fun being at the receiving end of a bitey pup. It hurts! It's no wonder that the leading complaint from puppy owners is "How do I stop him from biting?"

The short answer is: You don't! As Pat Miller explained in the preceding pages, smart owners do everything they can to help their puppies develop "bite inhibition" over time.

However, this doesn't mean you allow your puppy to puncture and hurt you! There are a number of things you can do to manage the situation until your puppy outgrows this important developmental phase.

The following is a list of things you can do to keep your skin, clothes, and other belongings intact while your puppy does his best Pac-Man impression:

- **Get lots of chew toys.** Seriously, *lots* of them. Don't skimp on the number or variety of chew toys your puppy has access to. Owners are often advised to keep only one or two toys out at a time (and to rotate them) so that their dogs don't become bored, but this does *not* apply to puppies!

Instead, make sure that there is an ample supply of appropriate things your puppy can pick up with his mouth as he explores his home. (Remember that to a puppy, literally everything in his path is a chew toy, so it's up to you to ensure your things – shoes, plants, remote controls, etc. – are safely stored.)

Further, when your puppy *does* pick up a toy, take advantage of the moment to reinforce this good behavior by showering him with attention. Think about it – if you ignore him when he picks up the correct item, but shout and jump around when he grabs your toes (or shoes), he'll quickly learn that biting toes (or shoes!) is a sure way to get your attention. Showing him that picking up a *toy*, instead, is indeed the best way to get your attention will pay off in the long run.

- **Introduce your pup to "latch ropes."** This doesn't have to be anything special; the term describes any long item that can be dragged behind you as you move through your home.

Moving objects are an open invitation for puppies to latch on with their teeth. Feet, pant legs, bath robe hems – they're all fair game! I suggest to clients that they make several of their own "latch ropes" and keep

It's impossible to have too many puppy toys. Make sure your pup's collection includes toys that are hard, soft, rubbery, crackly, chewy, stuffed, unstuffed . . . you get the idea!





Keep a “latch rope” in any room the puppy has access to, so there is always one close at hand to offer the puppy. Better that he grab the rope than your pants leg, skirt hem, or tender flesh!



You can make several latch ropes from a single pair of torn or worn-out jeans. Cut the legs off, cut the legs into strips, then braid and knot the ends.

them handy, all over the house. That way, when they walk from the living room to the kitchen, they can grab the closest latch rope and drag it behind them as they move. Puppy is more likely to latch onto that than to moving human feet. This is especially useful for kids who may feel terrorized by their new friend each time they walk or run through the house.

You don't need to buy a bunch of these toys; they are easy and inexpensive to make. You can cut an old beach towel or large bath towel in half (lengthways) to make two separate toys. Tie a knot in the center, then two smaller knots on each end. Or, ask your friends and family members to donate their old pairs of jeans. Cut the pant legs off, and then cut each pant leg into several long strips of fabric that you can then braid to make a denim rope. All of these homemade toys can easily be tossed into the washer when needed.

- **Redirect your pup to a “legal” object to bite.** Simply petting your puppy can sometimes prove difficult. He may view your hands on him as an invitation to play – and that means using his teeth! Scrambling to save your fingers from a chomping puppy mouth can look like the legendary Buster Keaton “sticky fingers” comedy routine – as soon as you free one hand, the puppy has latched on to the other! Try holding a chew toy for your puppy to gnaw on while your other hand gently strokes him. When done correctly, this is an excellent bonding experience.

- **Toss his treats on the floor.** Delivering a treat to a bitey puppy during training requires some skill. Avoid pinching the treat between your thumb and index finger, or your puppy's teeth may clamp down on your fingers. Instead,

offer the treat in the palm of your open hand, or, better yet, toss it to the floor.

There's an extra advantage to tossing treats directly on the floor: Your puppy will learn to anticipate that good stuff is delivered on the ground, and not necessarily from the hand. This will help curb his interest in human hands, and will result in less jumping up to bite them. It is especially helpful in keeping children's tiny hands safe.

BE PREPARED

By far the best plan of action for dealing with puppy biting involves being well-prepared. Manage your puppy's environment by storing anything you don't want him to chew, including plants, wires, and anything else within his reach. Have lots and lots of appropriate objects available for your puppy to wrap his teeth around, and remember to praise him every time he puts the right item in his mouth. Be patient; this shall pass! 🐾

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AVOID SAYING “NO!”

Shouting once or twice might work by startling your puppy at first, but soon he'll learn to ignore it. Sometimes, shouting or shrieking can actually cause the puppy to become *more* excited. It's perfectly normal for us to involuntarily respond to a sharp puppy bite by letting out a few choice words, but it is certainly not an effective training plan. Instead, quickly refer to one of the suggestions above.



CONSUMER
ALERT

Empathy for your Vet

We may not always be happy with the services rendered by our veterinarians, but only rarely is this caused because the medical professionals don't care about our animals.

The start of spring is always a little bitter-sweet for me. I love the longer days, but it also marks the painful anniversary of losing my first Golden Retriever, Quiz.

Quiz was diagnosed with a mass on his spleen and went in for surgery. During the procedure, a technician inadvertently administered an overdose of medication to address a series of non-critical arrhythmias. Immediately following the overdose, Quiz went into cardiac arrest and, despite CPR, did not recover. I was gutted by his loss. I wasn't the only one.

It still breaks my heart to think about the circumstances of his tragic passing, but I also remember the integrity demonstrated by the

surgeon responsible for his care. The specialty group did everything right in the aftermath of their horrific mistake. The medical director launched a full review of the incident to determine how best to modify surgical protocol to prevent future medication errors. The surgeon

remained as transparent as possible in sharing details of the incident and the subsequent review, while still protecting the privacy of the devastated technician. All charges were immediately reversed on my account. None of these actions brought back my beloved dog, but they felt authentic and were greatly appreciated.

Of course I was angry. But I also knew in my heart it was a mistake. Veterinarians and their staff members are only human, and humans sometimes make mistakes, even devastatingly tragic ones. As such, and because of how the practice immediately took full responsibility, it never felt right to direct my anger, a side effect of my intense pain, toward the surgeon and his team. I'm really glad I made that choice.

STRESSFUL JOB

In 2014, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention surveyed 10,000 mostly small-animal practice veterinarians. The sobering findings revealed roughly 14 percent of male and 19 percent of female veterinarians had seriously considered suicide – three times the national average. Approximately one percent of male and one and a half percent of female vets surveyed had actually attempted suicide. This sobering statistic hit home for many dog trainers in September 2014 when renowned veterinary behaviorist Sophia Yin took her own life.

Experts say the shocking rate of suicide within the profession is likely due to a combination of personality traits common among vets, and the stress and compassion fatigue associated with the profession. Most vets are perfectionists who are used to getting it right. After all, it took perfect grades to get into vet school. They often aren't adequately prepared to accept the life and death reality of the job, and every death, no matter the cause, can feel like failure.

It's long past time to remove the stigma associated with depression and mental illness. Consider supporting the work of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline and your local mental health agencies. And, please, be kind to your vet! Remember that she wants what's best for your animal. Understand the price on your bill generally represents a realistic cost for care, given steep overhead costs, not an attempt to price-gouge. I'm a big fan of hand-written "thank you" notes following non-routine procedures, and the occasional surprise note or token of appreciation.

As with many things, a little positive reinforcement can go a long way; you may never know just how far. 🐾

Stephanie Colman is a writer and dog trainer in Southern California. See page 24 for contact information.



Despite the shock of losing her dog in such a tragic way, the author sought to face the situation with grace, realizing the surgeon and his team were also devastated. No vet wants to lose a patient on the table.

Photo credit: Stephanie Colman



Want Some Cheese With That Whine?

The best way to stop a dog's whining depends on why she's doing it.

I'm pretty tolerant of annoying dog behaviors, and still, I have to admit, whining gets on my nerves. Our beloved Kelpie, Kai, whines. When he does, I have to remind myself that, rather than getting annoyed, I should value my dog's efforts to communicate, and figure out why the whining is happening. The "why" can be an important first step in modifying many behaviors, especially those that involve vocalization of some sort.



WHY THE WHINE?

Dogs whine for a variety of reasons. Understanding your dog's motivation for whining will lead you to the appropriate modification approach. Misinterpreting the whine, or simply chastising or otherwise punishing your dog for whining, can exacerbate the behavior and even give rise to other more serious behavioral issues. Consider these possible causes:

- **Pain or Discomfort.** When your dog is whining, the very important first step you should take is to identify and treat – or rule out – pain or discomfort. If your dog hurts, all the modification in the world isn't going to fix it.

Your dog may be too cold or too hot. Adjust the environment accordingly. Maybe his bedding is soiled. Give him a clean, dry blanket. Perhaps he's crated and really has to go to the bathroom. (This was explained to me recently by my dog Bonnie, when she was suffering from loose stools and had to go out at 3 a.m. If I had ignored her whining instead of rushing her outside, or worse, reprimanded her for disturbing my sleep, I would have paid a heavy clean-up price for being so unfair to my dog.)

It can be difficult to determine if dogs are in pain. Sure, sometimes they limp, flinch when

you touch them, or otherwise make it clear that they hurt, but sometimes they don't. Dogs can be pretty stoic. Plus, if they have bilateral pain (hurting equally on both sides) there's no point in limping; it just makes it hurt more on the other side.

If you think your dog may be in pain and your veterinarian can't find anything, ask about using carprofen or some other nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) as a diagnostic tool. If the behavior stops when he is medicated, and returns when the medication stops, it's a good indication that it's pain related.

While NSAIDs (such as Rimadyl) can have the potential for gastrointestinal, kidney, and liver side effects, long-term pain results in very poor quality of life. Some studies indicate that as many as 20 percent of dogs over the age of one year may suffer from osteoarthritis. Certainly, many dogs face increasing loss of mobility as they age due to the onset of arthritis. If your dog is whining due to pain, help him be comfortable. (See "Don't Fear NSAIDs for Your Dog," page 14.)

- **Stress.** Stress is the other major reason that dogs whine. (Pain is a stressor too, so in re-

The pain of osteoarthritis or strained tendons or ligaments can make an ordinarily stoic dog start to become whiny and seem anxious. In many cases, the anxiety is based in pain.

ality all whining is due to stress, but let's take a look at the non-pain-related stressors that can cause whining.)

- **Anxiety.** This is probably one of the most common causes of whining. The answer seems obvious, but I'll say it anyway: To reduce anxiety-related whining, you need to reduce your dog's anxiety, whatever the cause.

Distress over separation or isolation (and the anticipation thereof) are two common anxiety-related behaviors (see "Please Don't Leave," WDJ October 2016), but there are countless other reasons your dog may be anxious. Anything that causes him to be fearful can contribute to this type of whining, and some breeds even seem to have a genetic predisposition to whining.



A dog who has never been trained to walk without pulling, and whose owner has equipped him with a painful collar in a fruitless effort to stop the pulling, may whine from pain, frustration, and anxiety!

To help him be less anxious so he will whine less, make a list of things that cause your dog fear or stress, and pick two or three to start counter-conditioning, that is, changing how he feels about those things, so they no longer cause him stress or fear. When you can tick one stressor off your list, pick another to begin working on, until you

have addressed enough of them that whining is no longer a problem. Additionally, anxiety-induced and the other types of whining may improve with the application of the ever-growing list of various tools and protocols we have to help our dogs be calm. (More on this below.) For more information about reducing your dog's anxieties, see "Fear Itself," WDJ April 2007.

Don't Fear NSAIDs for Your Dog: There Are Worse Fates!

When Rimadyl (carprofen) first came into general usage in the early 1990s, there were alarming reports of dogs who suffered from liver and kidney damage after being given the drug, including some fatalities. However, two-plus decades later, reports indicate that the actual incidence of negative side effects is exceedingly low (.02 percent) and that most (70 percent) of those affected are geriatric dogs. Initially, veterinarians advised regular blood tests for dogs on Rimadyl as long as the dog was taking the drug. At least one recent study suggests that dogs who are going to have a bad reaction to the drug will have it early, and ongoing regular blood tests may not be necessary.

My first Kelpie suffered from severe arthritis in the mid 1990s at the age of 12, after a decade-plus of energetic activity. I was very close to euthanizing her to relieve her pain. When my veterinarian, Dr. Diana Phillips, suggested Rimadyl, I balked.

"I've heard some pretty bad things about Rimadyl," I said.

Dr. Phillips responded bluntly, "You're thinking about killing your dog tomorrow ... how bad can the Rimadyl be?"

Oh. Duh.

Rimadyl bought me two more years of quality life with my beloved Keli, she suffered no ill-effects from the drug, and Dr. Phillips' words have stayed with me. I often share this story with clients who are reluctant to consider pain relief for their dogs who are hurting. A simple pain relief medication just may make your dog look (and, of course, more importantly) feel so much better that you may forget he's got anything wrong with him at all.



- **Frustration.** This is also one of the more common causes of whining – and it's the whining that our Kai does. I include "demand whining" under this heading; while some sources list it as a separate category, I consider them the same. A dog who is whining to "demand" something is frustrated that he isn't getting what he wants – hence, the frustration whine.

The best way to help a frustrated whiner is to take away his frustration, preferably by preempting the behavior. I know that Kai will whine at agility class as he impatiently waits his turn to run. I can preempt his whine by giving him a stuffed Kong or other food-dispensing toy to take his mind off his troubles until it's our turn. If you do this before the whining starts, you won't reinforce the unwanted behavior.

- **Excitement.** Yes, some dogs whine just because they are so happy they can barely contain themselves. It's not as common as anxiety and frustration whining. Although this is *happy* whining, there is still some stress involved, though it is *eustress* (good stress) rather than (bad stress). Excited whining is often part of a greeting behavior, so I would be less concerned about this compared to the other types of whining that stem from distress.

However, if you do want to reduce your dog's excitement whining, ask him to engage in another behavior as part of your greeting ritual to shift his brain from excitement mode into thinking mode. One example: Keep a basket of toys outside your house, and as you enter, toss a toy for your dog to retrieve or play with.

- **Appeasement.** This is another not-so-common presentation of whining, and generally offered in social interactions with other dogs. In this case, it is a healthy communication, and not one you want to interfere with.

PLEASE DON'T PUNISH!

Some sources recommend punishing a dog's whine by using a squirt bottle, or worse. Others suggest a more benign form of punishment – removing your attention from the whiner. Generally I am vehemently opposed to the use of positive punishment (dog's behavior makes a bad thing happen), but when appropriate, I am not opposed to *negative punishment* (dog's behavior makes a good thing go away).

That said, I do *not* believe it's appropriate to use even negative punishment with a dog who is stressed; it's removing your support when he needs you the most!

I know all too well that whining can be annoying, but I feel it's important to keep foremost in your mind that most whining is a function of stress; while you may suppress the whining with punishment, you add another stressor, which is likely to exacerbate other stress-related behaviors. A better plan is to figure out *why* your dog is whining, reduce the stressors in his life, and help him change his behavior.

TEACHING CALMNESS

Fortunately, as the force-free training movement blessedly continues to gain momentum and we understand there are far better ways than punishment to help our stressed dogs be calm, our access to resources to help us accomplish that goal continues to grow. Here are some of the many options, in addition to counter-conditioning and desensiti-



Many dogs who suffer from separation anxiety whine when they are home alone; some also whine with anxiety before their owners leave in anticipation of being alone.

zation, for helping your dog be calm. (Note: Some of these may work on some dogs and not others. Keep trying until you find what works for yours.):

- **Exercise.** Not only does exercise use up energy your dog might otherwise expend in anxiety-related behaviors, a good round of aerobic exercise causes the release of feel-good endorphins (think “runner’s high”) that actually can help your dog be less anxious.
- **Choice.** According to Susan G. Friedman, PhD (psychology), “The power to control one’s own outcomes is essential to behavioral health.” Teaching your dog a “choice” cue and looking for opportunities to give him choices in his life can help ease anxieties. (For more information about this concept, see “Pro Choice,” WDJ November 2016.)

- **Positively reinforce for calm.** We tend to pay attention to our dogs when they act up, and ignore them when they are calm. Remember to quietly reinforce your dog when he is calm (soft praise, a calmly dropped treat) and you are likely to see more calm behavior.

- **Dr. Karen Overall’s Protocol for Relaxation.** Dr. Overall is a veterinary behaviorist with an unflinching commitment to force-free training and handling. Her very detailed day-by-day protocol can be used to help your dog relax. It’s laid out as a 15-day protocol, but you can take longer if your dog needs a slower pace, and break the small steps into even smaller ones as necessary to help your dog succeed. See tinyurl.com/KP-relax-protocol.

- **Karen Overall Protocol for Teaching a Dog to Take a Deep Breath.** I know that your dog already knows how to breathe! This exercise, a calming form of biofeedback, teaches him how to cease stress-related panting and breathe through his nose. Think of times that you were stressed and your friends may have reminded you to “Breathe!” See tinyurl.com/KP-dog-deep-breathe.

- **Massage.** Done properly, massage can be as relaxing for your dog as it is for you (assuming your dog does not find touch aversive). If used

Counter-Conditioning and Desensitization (CC&D)

Counter-conditioning involves changing your dog's association with an aversive stimulus from negative to positive. The easiest way to give most dogs a positive association with something is with very high-value treats. I like to use chicken – canned, baked, or boiled – since most dogs love chicken and it's a low-fat food.

Here's how CC&D works:

1 Determine the distance at which your dog can be in the presence of the stimulus and be alert or wary but not extremely fearful or aroused. This is the threshold distance.

2 While holding your dog on leash, have a helper present the stimulus at threshold distance X, or, alternatively, position yourself and your dog so that the stimulus will appear at threshold distance X. The instant your dog sees the stimulus, start feeding bits of chicken. Pause, let him look again, feed again. Repeat as long as the stimulus is present.

3 Continue pausing and feeding until the stimulus is out of sight or, after several seconds, have the helper remove the stimulus, and stop feeding chicken.

4 Repeat steps 1-3 until the appearance of the stimulus at that distance consistently causes your dog to look at you with a happy, "Yay! Where's my chicken?" expression. This is a conditioned emotional response (CER); your dog's association with the stimulus at threshold distance X is now positive instead of negative. Generalize this to various X's at various locations.

5 Now you need to increase the intensity of the stimulus. You can do that by decreasing distance to the stimulus; by increasing movement of the stimulus at distance X (a child walking, skipping, or swinging her arms); by increasing number of stimuli (two or three children, instead of one); increasing the visual "threat" (a tall man instead of a short one, or a man with a beard instead of a clean-shaven one); or by increasing volume (if it's a stimulus that makes noise, such as a vacuum

cleaner). I suggest decreasing distance first in small increments by moving the dog closer to the location where the stimulus will appear, with your dog achieving your intended CER at each new distance, until he is happy to be very near to the non-moving stimulus.

6 Then return to distance X and add intensity of stimulus (move the vacuum a little; have two children instead of one; have the man put on a hat, or a backpack), gradually decreasing distance and attaining CERs along the way, until your dog is delighted to have the moderately intense stimulus in close proximity.

7 Now, back to distance X, increase intensity again. (Your helper turns the vacuum on briefly.) Feed treats the instant the intensity increases, and stop the treats the moment it decreases.

8 Repeat until you have CERs, then gradually increase the length of time you have your dog in the presence of the increased-intensity stimulus, until he's happy to have it continuously present.

9 Begin decreasing distance in small increments, moving the dog closer to the stimulus, obtaining your CER consistently at each new distance.

10 When your dog is happy to have the higher intensity stimulus close to him, you're ready for the final phase. Return to distance X and obtain the intended CER there with a full intensity stimulus (a running, moving vacuum; multiple children laughing and playing; etc.). Gradually decrease distance until your dog is happy to be in the presence of your full-intensity stimulus. He now thinks the stimulus is a very good thing – a reliable predictor of very yummy treats. In the case of a human stimulus, you can gradually work up to actual interaction with the human(s), by having the person(s) drop treats as they walk by, then letting your dog take treats from their fingers – without direct eye contact, and eventually working up to normal interaction.

The more complex the stimulus and intense the fear response, the more challenging the behavior is to modify. Anxieties and phobias usually require more time and a more in-depth modification program.

Sarah Richardson of The Canine Connection in Chico, Calif., offers this fearful dog treats when he notices a stranger nearby. Soon, he will associate strangers with good things and feel less anxiety when near them.



in conjunction with a scent such as lavender, which has calming properties of its own, you can then use the scent in other venues to help your dog calm himself, due to its association with the calming massage.

- **TTouch.** Another form of calming touch developed by Linda Tellington-Jones, TTouch uses specific types of touch, movement, wraps, and other equipment to help a dog learn to relax. (See ttouch.com for more information.)
- **Calming Cap** (also known as Thunder Cap). Similar to the hood used to keep a captive falcon calm, the Calming Cap reduces the intensity of visual stimuli to help your dog stay calm. Your dog can see through the Calming Cap, but details are blurred. It can be very useful for dogs who have difficulty staying below threshold. Remember to associate the Calming Cap with treats so your dog learns to love having it put on. (See thundershirt.com/thundercap.html.)
- **Thunder Shirt.** This product (or other snug-fitting dog-shirt) functions on the same principle as swaddling an infant. Studies show that infants who are swaddled cry less, and the extrapolation is that dogs can also be comforted by the feeling of being held; it seems to work for many dogs. (See thundershirt.com.)
- **Adaptil.** Previously known as Comfort Zone, Dog Appeasing Pheromone, and DAP), this is a synthetic substance that is meant to mimic the natural pheromones that are emitted by a mother dog nursing her puppies. The biological effect of the *natural* pheromone helps calm the puppies; this product purports to do the same for adult dogs. It is available in a spray, plug-in, and collar. While some professionals report good results with the

product, others feel strongly that it is snake oil. We put it in the “can’t hurt, might help” category.

- **Through a Dog’s Ear.** This is music, specifically selected for its potential to calm dogs. The music selections are sold as CDs, or in a marvelous, small (2½ by 3 inches), portable unit called the iCalmDog that has amazing sound quality. It’s very calming for *humans*; if I play it in my office while I’m working I’ll fall asleep at my desk! Play this music when things are calm in your home to help your dog relax and so he forms a very good association with it, and then you can also use it during counter-conditioning practice to give him the same calm association that he had when it was playing at home. (See throughadogsear.com.)
- **Nutraceuticals.** These products, isolated or purified from foods, are generally sold in medicinal forms not usually associated with food. A nutraceutical is demonstrated to have a physiological benefit or provide protection against chronic disease. Two that are FDA-approved for use in dogs are **Anxitane** (L-theanine) and **Zylkene** (casein). If they interest you, discuss them with your veterinarian to be sure she is comfortable with their use for your dog. If so, you can get them through your vet or online. I have had success with over the counter L-theanine. I buy the capsules, so I can open them and sprinkle the contents on my dog’s food. If you get the chewable tablets, be sure you do not get any that contain xylitol, which is deadly toxic to dogs.

MEDICATION

In addition to all the things mentioned above, there are a variety of psychotropic drugs that can help ease your dog’s stress and anxiety. I tend to recommend the medication route to clients when their dogs have a level of anxiety that is clearly destructive to the quality of life for canine and/or human. These

What you can do

- *Identify the cause of your dog’s whining so you can determine the appropriate modification response.*
- *Implement other procedures and products that can help your dog be more calm.*
- *Seek veterinary assistance if your dog’s anxiety is excessive.*

must be obtained from a veterinarian, and here’s the rub: Most veterinary schools do not require vet students to take classes in behavior, and most veterinarians aren’t very well-informed about behavior modification drugs. Well-meaning as they are, they can easily prescribe the wrong medication – sometimes even (unintentionally) recommending a medication that makes behavior worse instead of better.

As a non-veterinarian, it’s not appropriate (or legal) for me to suggest specific medications to clients. The good news is that many veterinary behaviorists offer free phone consultations to other vets who want information regarding appropriate medication selection and dosage for their clients’ animal companions. Even if your veterinarian charges you something for her time to do the research, it shouldn’t be cost prohibitive, and the consult will be well worth the cost.

Your vet can find contact information for veterinary behaviorists on the website for the American College for Veterinary Behaviorists: dacvb.org/about/member-directory. 🐾

Author Pat Miller, CBCC-KA, CPDT-KA, is WDJ’s Training Editor. She and her husband Paul live in Fairplay, Maryland, site of her Peaceable Paws training center. Miller is also the author of many books on positive training. Her newest is Beware of the Dog: Positive Solutions for Aggressive Behavior in Dogs. See “Resources,” page 24, for contact information, information on her classes for dog owners and trainers, and book purchasing details.



Sadly Common Maladies

With simple observation and proactive management, you can prevent the three conditions that most frequently compromise dogs' quality of life.



Keeping your dog thin will do more than anything else you can do to support his vibrant good health over his lifetime – and may even extend his life!

There are innumerable exotic diseases and bizarre injuries that can *potentially* afflict any individual dog, but, sadly, the vast majority of dogs in this country today *will* suffer from one of a few very prosaic disorders. And many dogs suffer from every single one of the maladies discussed below! Even sadder: All of these life-impairing conditions are 100 percent preventable – *easily* preventable!

1 OBESITY. There are so many overweight pets in this country that there is at least one organization whose sole purpose is to quantify them and help their owners reduce the problem. The Association for Pet Obesity Prevention (APOP) estimates that more than 50 percent of the dogs in this country (and almost 60 percent of cats!) are overweight or obese.

Obese dogs are prone to a number of health problems that are directly related to their weight, including strongly increased incidence of osteoarthritis, high blood pressure, heart and respiratory disease, cranial cruciate ligament injuries, kidney disease, many forms

of cancer, and a decreased life expectancy. Though many people assume otherwise, there is actually no clear evidence that obesity causes diabetes in dogs. However, obesity *can* contribute to insulin resistance, making it more difficult to regulate overweight dogs with diabetes. Obesity is also a risk factor for pancreatitis, which can lead to diabetes.

Fat dogs get caught in the same vicious cycle that fat humans do: the extra weight they carry makes it harder for them to exercise by putting extra strain on their joints, muscles, tendons, and ligaments, and discouraging them from exercising as much or as long. A fat dog has to work harder than his slim counterpart on the same hike, just

as you would have to work harder if you were carrying a backpack with an extra 20 percent or more of your body weight in it. Given the extra workload, a fat dog may ache more than the slim dog the day after a long walk, and be less enthusiastic about going on the next walk. And the less exercise he gets, the fatter he may become.

The first step is recognizing the problem

There are many reasons that dogs get fat – and the first is owner non-recognition of their dogs' obesity! I've hurt the feelings of several friends and family members when I've tried to educate them about their dogs' condition. I try to be kind and tactful – and I suspect their veterinarians do, too, because almost invariably, people will tell me, "My vet has never said anything about it!"

It shouldn't take a friend *or* a veterinarian to "diagnose" a fat dog. Your dog is likely overweight if, when viewed from above, she has no appreciable waist; or if you can't *very* easily feel your dog's ribs. Running your hand

across her ribcage should feel rather like palpating the back of your hand, with bones covered with only a thin layer of skin and muscle. If it feels more like it does when you palpate the palm of your hand just below your fingers, she's likely overweight; if it feels more like the meaty part of your palm at the base of your thumb, she's probably obese!

But perhaps you know your dog is a little heavier than she ought to be – you just hate to take away anything that makes her happy. Please remember that she will decidedly *not* be happy when she's suffering from osteoarthritis at age 5, or exercise-intolerant at age 7. Our dogs' lives are short enough! Condemning them to even shorter lives, full of pain and (at the very least) discomfort for the latter half of their lives is not very kind at all.

Ideally, you help your dog stay fit and trim with an appropriate diet and the right amount of daily exercise. If your dog is already fat, make it a priority to help her lose weight and gain fitness. If you (slowly) increase the lengths of the walks you take her on, you just may find that you lose some

weight as well! For most of us, that would be a very good thing, indeed!

FOR MORE ON HELPING YOUR DOG LOSE WEIGHT, PLEASE SEE:

- "Weight Loss Tips for Senior Dogs," 2/17
- "Exercise Your Senior Dog," 12/16
- "Help Your Dog Lose Weight," 9/09
- "Low Fat Diets," WDJ 12/09

2 DENTAL DISEASE. I'm certain I've never met a single dog owner that liked maintaining her dog's dental hygiene – unless her dog had perfectly clean teeth without any efforts from the owner whatsoever. Whether you brush your dog's teeth and/or pay for your dog to have her teeth cleaned at the veterinarian's office, it's an unhappy chore.

Some dogs *do* go through life, from puppyhood to old age, without forming a bit of dental calculus (also known as tartar). But most dogs have significant dental issues by the time they are middle-aged; one study identified periodontitis (inflammation of the tissue around the teeth, often causing shrinkage of the gums and loosening

of the teeth) in a whopping 82 percent of dogs aged 6 to 8 years!

What's the problem with that? Periodontal disease can lead to histopathologic changes in the kidneys, liver, and myocardium, and has been linked to cardiac diseases in dogs.

Also, unless a dog is anesthetized fully for a dental cleaning, things like cracked or broken teeth may go undiagnosed for a long time, leaving your dog in daily pain, especially when eating or trying to play with toys. And a dog who is forced to endure chronic dental pain may be (understandably) cranky with his human and canine family members. (I can't tell you how many times I've heard about dogs who had developed aggressive behavior that went away almost immediately after a cracked tooth was finally detected and removed.)

It only makes sense to keep an eye on your dog's teeth – including those hard-to-see molars in the back – and take appropriate action to keep them clean and healthy. When you schedule your dog's annual wellness exam (you *do* take your dog in for an annual exam, don't you?), make sure your

It's worth the time, effort, and money needed to maintain the holy trinity of canine dental health: clean teeth; tight, pink gums; and breath that doesn't knock you over!



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veterinarian takes more than a one- or two-second peek at your dog's teeth. (You can facilitate this by training your dog to allow you to lift his lips for increasingly longer moments, until his teeth can be visually inspected pretty thoroughly.) And plan on taking whatever steps are necessary to maintain his dental health, from daily brushing and the regular use of dental rinses or gels that help control dental tartar, to a professional dental cleaning under anesthesia at your veterinarian's clinic.

FOR MORE ON MAINTAINING YOUR DOG'S TEETH, PLEASE SEE:

- "Prevent Periodontal Disease," 10/15
- "Dental Hygiene: How and Why," 2/14
- "How to Care For Your Dog's Teeth," 4/12
- "Clean Teeth, Healthy Dogs," 10/02

3 OVER-LONG NAILS. This problem may not seem as dramatic as the first two, but while it's true that long toenails only rarely cripple a dog and don't cause systemic disease, they can significantly decrease a dog's quality of life by making his every step uncomfortable. (Plus, this can contribute to or aggravate a weight problem, as a dog whose feet hurt more and more from over-long nails becomes reluctant to exercise.)

Super-long nails are usually easy

to spot, but dogs who have long hair on their legs and feet may be hiding painfully long nails – and perhaps even lesions on their toes from where long, curving nails have created pressure sores on adjacent toes.

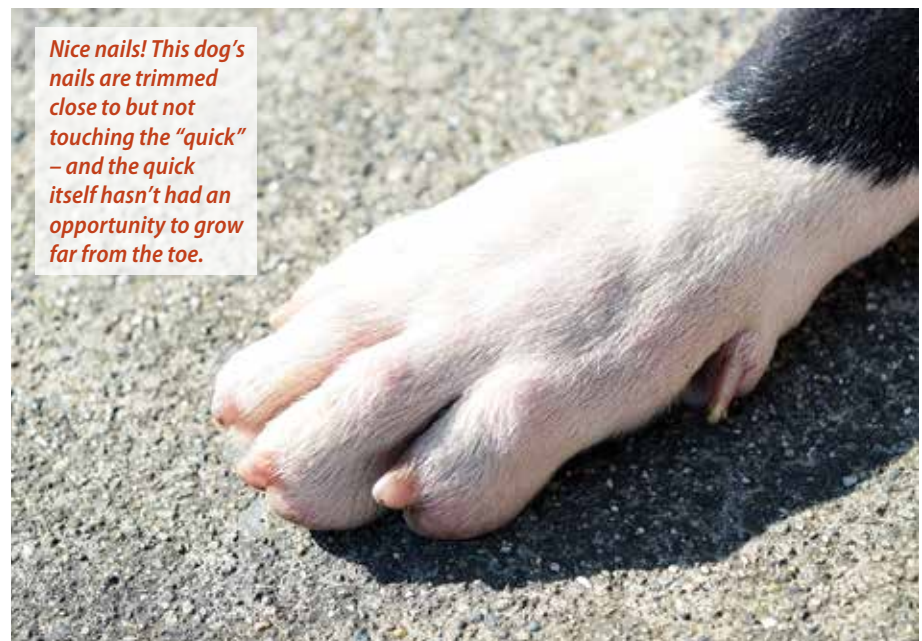
But if they are not yet at an obvious, curving, "Call the SPCA" length, how do you know if your dog's nails are too long? The best test is to listen closely as he walks across a tile or hardwood floor: If you can hear his nails go "Tick, tick, tick, tick," as he walks, they are too long! (I'm guessing 90 percent of you just went, "Ugh!")

If your dog's nails are thick and long, don't despair – but don't avoid this important, basic responsibility, either. If you are easily able to cut your dog's nails, trim a tiny bit off each nail weekly. If it's a struggle for you (for any reason, whether your dog's behavior or your own squeamishness), look for a groomer who will help you schedule trimming visits frequently enough to restore your dog's feet to health over the next few months.

FOR MORE ON TRIMMING YOUR DOG'S NAILS, PLEASE SEE:

- "The Important of Nail Trimming," 4/16
- "Keeping Your Dog's Feet Healthy," 3/14
- "Force-Free Trimming Techniques," 8/12

Nancy Kerns is the editor of WDJ.



ACTION
PLAN

Five Tips to Train Like a Pro

Ever wonder how professional trainers can get your dog to do things – seemingly effortlessly – that you struggle to get him to repeat? Here are five of their most effective training “secrets.”



Photo credit: Jennifer Spinkland-Lloyd

Life is so much easier when a dog or puppy readily accepts being gated out of or into certain areas in his home, rather than practicing attention-seeking behaviors or other assorted forms of adolescent mischief. For best results, make the area comfortable and practice often; don't limit the set-up to those times when you need him confined for longer periods.

As a professional trainer, I've recently been in the middle of “puppy season.” At the training school where I'm on staff, recent puppy classes have been full with a wait list. Inevitably, at least one exasperated owner each week will exclaim, “Oh, my gosh! Puppies are so much work!” as she flops her overwhelmed self into a chair, her puppy dancing distractedly at the end of her leash, while fellow owners sigh and nod in agreement.

Yes, raising and training a puppy – or any dog – takes work, but it doesn't need to feel overwhelming – at least, not the majority of the time! The more you know, the easier it gets. As I think about my own approach to raising and living with dogs, and that of many of my colleagues, I realize we engage in numerous behaviors that are extraordinarily helpful – yet it's often difficult to get the pet owners we work for to try them! Don't resist! The following five tips can help you train like a pro:

1 START PROACTIVELY MANAGING MATTERS.

I can't stress this enough! I would much rather proactively prevent the development of bad habits via humane management than give a puppy, adolescent, or newly adopted dog too much freedom and have to fix things later. When left to their own devices, it's easy for dogs to experiment with unwanted behaviors, and, like people, dogs get good at whatever they practice!

Until your dog truly understands what constitutes the behaviors you desire from him and is motivated to perform them, you have only two *good* options:

- assume the role of active trainer and help the dog perform correctly, and
- prevent the rehearsal of unwanted behavior.

Of course, good training is the most reliable path toward long-term success, but in our busy lives, active training isn't always convenient. Our households may contain a variety of people with varying levels of interest in the dog, and our days are met with myriad responsibilities. It's not realistic to think we're *always* in a position to play the role of effective dog trainer. That's where management becomes so important.

Good management helps prevent problem behaviors, or prevents them from getting worse. It may consist of something as simple as restricting access to front-facing windows (if your dog nuisance-barks at passersby) or gating a counter-surfing dog out of the kitchen when you can't supervise, or numerous other scenarios where a temporary “quick fix” might be appreciated. It's a great way to create “breath-

ing room” while deciding how best to address an issue in the long term.

2 PAY UP, IN VALUABLE CURRENCY.

When it comes to using food in training, what, how, when, and how much are powerful variables to consider. There are lots of ways to reinforce a dog beyond simply using food, but food is so powerful and so effective in the vast majority of cases that we feel its use should be thoroughly explored.

Because we’ve seen food treats work so well, trainers will usually experiment with a variety of food items to help discover what motivates a dog; we understand what is motivating in one setting might not cut the mustard under different circumstances.

Most trainers I know prefer high-quality, meat-based treats for the nutritional content and palatability, and we aren’t afraid to “go big” with “people” food like cooked meats or cheese when needed. While many of the name-brand dog treats on the market have considerable advertising budgets, and we’ve grown up on the commercials, for many dogs, *simulated* steak, sausages, and assorted crunchy biscuits just don’t cut it.

Once you’ve found a menu of food items deemed valuable to your dog, it’s important to consider *how* the food is used to affect both your training and your relationship.

In short, food given when a dog performs correctly is a reward. Food that only appears when a dog doesn’t respond to cues is a *lure*. Trainers stop using lures the moment they can get the dog to do a behavior without one, and are careful to quickly reward and shape the dog’s increasingly quicker and more accurate attempts at the behavior after hearing or seeing the cue.

Positive reinforcement trainers understand the ideal goal is about mutual respect between dog and handler, not a need to assert dominance over a canine companion.

If you find yourself luring often, it’s important to carefully evaluate the situation. It’s possible that your dog thinks the proper sequence is, “I hear or see the cue; I wait; the lure appears; I do the behavior; and I get the treat!” Another possibility is that he doesn’t understand the behavior as well as you thought he did; it’s not uncommon to think a dog “knows” something long before the behavior is truly fluent. (See “Understanding Fluency,” WDJ December 2015.)

Even how you *deliver* a treat makes a difference. The biggest advantage to using soft treats is the ability to quickly break them up during delivery. When I want to make a big impression on my dog, I’ll offer what he thinks is 10 treats, when, really, it’s only two pieces quickly torn into even smaller pieces as I deliver them one at a time. Dogs are excellent cookie accountants, and 10 treats are better than two. As I often say to clients, “Treats just need to be big enough for the dog to taste them on the way down!”

When rewarding with food, remember, the greater the distraction,

the higher the rate of reinforcement needed. If your social dog is highly excited by visitors and wants to jump, he might initially need a treat every two seconds to convince him it’s “worth it” to keep his feet on the floor when exciting guests are present. If your dog is very environmentally aware, he might initially need a treat for every step he takes while maintaining a loose leash. The key word is “initially.” Not forever, but we have to start somewhere.

If you’re concerned about the quantity of treats used, set aside and then use part of your dog’s kibble; it’s calories he’d eat anyway, and now you can leverage them to your benefit.

Another secret: It matters how you interact with your dog during treat *delivery*, too. Are you a robotic Pez dispenser, or are treats often accompanied by genuine praise and petting in ways your dog finds enjoyable? Keep in mind that classical conditioning is always at play. When you pair treats with praise and petting, you build positive associations that make your praise and petting more valuable to your dog, even when given without food.



Photo credit: Kelvin Andow

In our busy lives, we must remember to set aside time to truly enjoy our canine friends, whether it's during a walk in the woods or just a quiet moment.

3 BE A TEAM LEADER, NOT A PACK LEADER.

The concept of pack leadership is still alive and well in modern-day dog training, and, in my opinion, it brings with it a lot of baggage, namely that it's important for humans to be "dominant" over their dogs by "winning" behavioral battles and not letting dogs "get away with" failing to comply with a "command." Blech!

I do believe dogs benefit from leadership, but it's more about their need for clarity in understanding what works and what doesn't (good training!) than asserting dominance over a subordinate.

I prefer to think of my dogs and myself as a team. Sure, I'm the team captain, and as such, I appreciate being treated by my canine teammates in ways that feel "respectful," but I also understand how, as team captain, it's my responsibility to *fairly* teach my dogs the skills they need in order to help them appropriately exist in our human-oriented world.

Good trainers understand a dog's "disobedience" is not a personal attack against the handler; it's a sign the dog is struggling to handle something difficult, and a clear indication he needs some help. Misbehavior isn't a dog's dominant attempt to take over the household, it's just behavior, and behavior can be changed.

4 BE PATIENT.

Behavior can be changed, but true behavior change takes time. It's important to be patient and commit oneself to a training protocol for a good bit of time before deciding it's not working.

In one of my favorite books, *Tales of Two Species*, Patricia McConnell writes, "It takes growing humans



Photo credit: Cecile Michiels

about 20 years to learn to control their emotions (Okay, some people never do!), so be patient with your dogs and think in terms of months and years when training, not days and weeks." I love that!

Remember to break behaviors into easier steps and look for small areas of improvement along the way. Modifying well-rehearsed and complex behavior issues happens through a series of baby steps. Learning to recognize those small elements of progress goes a long way toward motivating yourself to keep at it.

Keep a log of your dog's behavior. Even something as simple as a few words on the calendar can help you recognize behavior trends.

In the meantime, if you're dealing with complex behavior issues such as aggression or anxiety, know that you have the empathy of others. You brought a dog into your home because you wanted a canine companion, not a complicated training project. It's okay to sometimes feel frustrated, but try not to let those feelings cloud your ability to maintain realistic expectations and recognize small accomplishments along the way.

5 BE PRESENT.

Take the time to really see the wonderful creature with whom you

share your life. When you take your dog for a walk, pay attention to your dog. Interact with him. Play with him. Practice behaviors. Make it easy for your dog to be correct and reward correct behavior.

Also – and this is a big one these days – stay off of your phone! If you want your dog to pay attention to you when you feel it's important, your dog needs to believe your attention, in general, has value, and he needs a strong history of rewarding experiences. Aspire to create meaningful, engaged interactions with your dog on a daily basis, whatever that looks like for the two of you.

Similarly, remember to meet your dog at his level during every training session and every real-world encounter. Clients often exclaim, "He's not like this at home!" or "He does it at home!" when their dogs struggle to perform as requested in a busy group class. Dogs are context-specific; generalization takes time.

Do whatever is necessary to help your dog be successful given the current circumstances, and you'll appreciate and enjoy the results for many days to come. 🐾

Stephanie Colman is a writer and dog trainer in Southern California. See page 24 for contact information.

Letters from Our Readers

We reviewed dry dog foods in the February 2017 issue, and included a list of companies that make foods that meet all of our selection criteria for quality dog foods. This year, we asked the companies that had been on our “approved dry dog foods” list in previous years to provide us with in-

dependent lab test results that could confirm that their foods do, in fact, contain nutrients in the amounts that the companies claim.

Some companies asked for more time in order to provide us with the information we had asked for, and the following three pet food makers

followed through by supplying us with verification of their nutritional content. We will add this information to the complete list of “WDJ’s Approved Dry Dog Foods for 2017” that appeared in the February issue as well as in our online edition: tinyurl.com/WDJ-2017-dry.

ADDITIONS TO WDJ’S APPROVED DRY DOG FOODS FOR 2017

COMPANY INFO	MFR: SELF OR CO-PACK?	NUTRIENT ANALYSES	# OF VARIETIES, GRAIN-FREE?	MEAT, MEAL, OR BOTH?	PROTEIN RANGE, FAT RANGE	ANY RECALLS	PRICE	NOTES
ANNAMAET Telford, PA (888) 723-0367 annamaet.com	Co-packed, in OH and NY	Provided lab results	11, 5 grain-free	Most use meal only; two use both	24% - 33% 7% - 20%	No	\$2- \$3 /lb	• Company claims no ingredients from China are used, not even any vitamins or minerals.
EARTHBORN HOLISTIC Midwestern Pet Food Evansville, IN (800) 474-4163 x450 earthbornholistic petfood.com	Self-made, in IN	Computer analyses	10, 6 grain-free	Meal	22% - 38% 7% - 20%	No	\$1.70 - \$2/lb	• Each product contains animal protein from 2-3 species. • Family-owned company.
ZIGNATURE Pets Global Valencia, CA (888) 325-7207 zignature.com	Co-packed, in MN	Provided lab results	9, all grain-free	Both	26% - 32% 14% - 18%	No	\$1.50 - \$3/lb	• All foods are free of grain, potatoes, and chicken. (Yes, chicken. The company provides alternatives to this very common ingredient.)

Congratulations on 20 years! I believe I just might be one of your first readers. I remember the days when an edition for our kitty friends was available, too! I’ve learned so much from WDJ, kept most copies over the years, shared my knowledge with friends and family, and encouraged them to subscribe as well.

So, when I received the March edition with the new design, I thought it looked great. But, as I began to read the Editor’s Note column, I was taken aback and a little upset regarding your comments regarding your 19-year Golden Retriever logo! As a mom to many rescued Golden Retrievers over the years, I found your comments upsetting: “I never really gave my heart to the

Golden Retriever who used to appear in the Journal’s logo. I always wanted him to lose some weight, and show a little more enthusiasm for the job.” Really? I’m hoping you were trying to be funny, but, so sorry, you missed the mark!

Of all breeds, Golden Retrievers can be the most enthusiastic! And the weight loss thing – I guess he wasn’t taking WDJ’s advice as to the proper diet! Oh well. My feelings are hurt, but I’ll get over it.

I’m happy for your sweet and handsome boy, Otto. He *should* be your logo! And, again, congrats on 20 years! But, please reconsider your negative view on my beloved Golden Retrievers!

CYNDI PALMER
Overland Park, KS

Hello, Cyndi! Thank you so much for your loyalty to WDJ for all these years – and I hope you will accept my sincere apology for seeming to insult Golden Retrievers. I was giddy about the changes in design and the inclusion of my beloved Otto as the new logo dog. Drunk with love and enthusiasm for the new logo, I “dissed” the faithful former logo dog.

But I certainly didn’t mean to slur all Golden Retrievers! I was being dogged about a complaint I first made 20 years ago, that the logo dog looked a little fat and dumb; I thought he should look keener and more athletic, like most Golden Retrievers! But I ended up sounding catty, instead. He didn’t deserve that. – Editor 🐾

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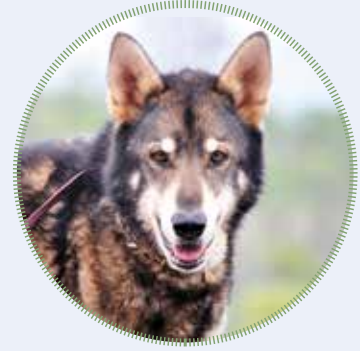
WDJ Training Editor Pat Miller is author of many books on force-free, pain-free, fear-free training, including *Do Over Dogs: Give Your Dog a Second Chance at a First Class Life*; *How to Foster Dogs: From Homeless to Homeward Bound*; *Play With Your Dog*; *Positive Perspectives: Love Your Dog, Train Your Dog*, and more. All of these, and her newest book, *Beware of the Dog: Positive Solutions for Aggressive Behavior in Dogs*, are available from dogwise.com and wholedogjournal.com

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