

Your complete guide to natural dog care and training

# Whole Dog Journal™



Photo credit: Susan Lindeman

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**On page 18. Typical teen teething** – What to expect during your dog’s adolescence.



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# Greetings, Friends

*Do you have reason to feel self-conscious or embarrassed about your dog's behavior?*

Today, collaboration is frequently enabled by so much technology that it's possible to work with someone for more than a decade without ever meeting them face-to-face. That's the case with me and Lisa Rodier, a Rhode Island author/trainer who has written dozens of articles for WDJ over the past 10 years: We've never met in person. Last weekend, we were within 80 miles of each other, as she had flown to northern California to attend a K9 Nosework event. Lisa had a few hours free on the day she landed, so we planned to meet.



Like most of my WDJ collaborators, Lisa and I have shared a lot of personal information with each other about our canine family members. I sympathized with her over the decline and eventual loss of Axel and Jolie, her beloved senior Bouvier des Flandres, and celebrated the eventual acquisition of her next Bouv, Atle. She's enjoyed speculating about the genetic origins of my 10-year-old mixed-breed Otto (seen above) ever since I adopted him from my local shelter; when she wrote an article for WDJ about canine DNA tests, we had Otto's DNA tested, and she discussed the results in the article.

I would have liked to bring Otto with me to meet Lisa, too, but Otto has never been a great traveler, and in his senior years, he has gotten increasingly anxious in cars. So, instead, I brought my two-year-old presumed pit/Lab-mix, Woody.

When we are out in public, I am pretty confident in Woody's ability to pass as a well-trained, well-behaved dog. But when I was driving with him toward meeting a dog trainer whom I respect but have never met, I found myself feeling anxious. I should probably warn her about Woody's predilection for walking through people's legs, I thought; it's a tad alarming when he dives between someone's thighs, even though he's always wagging his whole body when he does this. Short people and kids sometimes get lifted off the ground for a moment; it's his special way of saying hi! And it's far better than his second-favorite way of greeting his friends, with a sudden hop up to flick their face with his tongue (but every so often accidentally giving someone a fat lip with that big skull of his). Woody won't do these things when he's on leash, but when socializing off-leash, he's exuberant and effusive in his affection for our friends, whether or not he's met them before.

Thank goodness, Woody didn't bruise Lisa during the few hours that we spent together, though she did get licked a few more times than she probably planned on. And I'm *pretty* sure she was only pretending to be horrified when he helped himself to a drink of water out of my glass at the outdoor cafe where we had a late lunch.

Well, I'm attending a wedding in Rhode Island in the fall. We'll see how young Axel compares in the good-manners department.

NK



CONSUMER  
ALERT

# Rest Insured

*Knowing exactly what you need in an insurance plan for your dog can reduce insurance-claim letdown.*

We last discussed pet insurance in the September 2015 issue of WDJ. As we gathered information for this update, we immediately noticed an improvement in what the various insurance companies cover and don't cover. We also noticed that there are many more companies offering pet insurance than there were three years ago; perhaps the competitive rates are due to the greater number of insurance-company choices.

We've listed the major players in pet health insurance on pages 6-7. Below are 15 things to pay attention to when deciding which of these plans might be best for you and your dogs.

**1 Figure out how much will you have to spend.** The first things to consider when choosing which company is right for you and your pets are your out-of-pocket amounts: monthly (or annual) premium payment, deductibles, and copays.

When you got your first car, did you choose the lowest deductible, knowing there was no way you could come up with \$1,000 if there was an accident, so that meant your monthly premium was uncomfortably high? Or did you choose a plan with the highest deductible and lowest monthly premium, hoping and praying you wouldn't have an accident? You have to make a similar choice here: The lower your deductible, the more you'll pay in a premium. The higher the deductible, the lower the premium.

Deductibles range from \$50 to \$1,000, with possible custom amounts available (you may have to call and talk with an agent). We were impressed with Embrace's Healthy Pet Deductible strategy, which reduces your deductible by \$50 each year you don't have a claim. When you do have a claim, the deductible resets to the original amount.

Make sure that you check to see how each company you consider takes off the deductible. Some insurers subtract the deductible before calculating the co-insurance, which lowers your overall out-of-pocket expense. Others first cal-



culate the co-insurance and then subtract the deductible from the remaining amount, which may cause your out-of-pocket total to rise.

Watch out: Some policies have a per-incident deductible instead of an annual deductible, although these plans are increasingly rare. With a per-incident \$250 deductible, for example, you have to pay the first \$250 of every claim you submit. With an annual \$250 deductible, you pay the first \$250 for the year's claims.

Also consider your co-payment options, which are generally 10 to 30 percent of the total bill. Cancer treatments can quickly reach \$10,000. A 30-percent copay on that will be more than \$3,300 – on top of your deductible. The North American Pet Health Insurance Association (NAPHIA) says 80 percent is the most commonly selected co-insurance, which means the insurer pays 80 percent and you pay 20 percent of every claim.

*If your dog becomes seriously ill or has an accident requiring surgery or other advanced treatment, having even lousy pet health insurance is better than having none at all. And having a good plan and knowing you can afford the co-payments can give you peace of mind at an otherwise terrible time.*



*You never know when you will find yourself at the emergency veterinary hospital – again.*

**2 Be ready to pay (or at least, put down some plastic).** Keep in mind that most veterinarians will require you pay for your service up front and be reimbursed by the insurance company. Only a few companies reimburse the vet directly; Trupanion reimburses only enrolled vets directly.

**3 Be aware that it's not difficult to get a five percent reduction on your premium.** Insurers offer this discount for a variety of reasons, including military backgrounds, signing up online, veterinarian-employee discounts, AAA, multiple insured pets, and more. We found Pets Best Pet Insurance, sold by Farmer's Insurance, offers policyholders a five percent discount by going through Farmers.

**4 Consider your dog's potential for health problems.** What are the conditions that he's most likely to develop? For instance, Golden Retrievers have a high incidence of cancer. German Shepherd Dogs are prone to hip dysplasia. Papillons frequently have dental problems. Will these conditions be covered if needed?

Consider what you do with your dog, too. If he's a sporting dog (agility, herding, flyball, dock diving), for example, look carefully at the coverage for orthopedic injuries.

**5 Look over the exclusions.** If the policy doesn't spell out the coverage you want, you probably won't have it. Read carefully to learn exactly what is covered. If you don't see "hip dysplasia," it's probably not covered. In fact, it's probably listed in the exclusions list. Read every exclusion. If something is excluded that your dog is at high risk for, keep looking.

**6 Be very careful when you find the words "medically necessary treatment."** For example, Embrace defines "medically necessary" as "in our reasonable judgment." In contrast, Healthy Paws says it covers medically necessary treatment "recommended by your veterinarian."

In order to appeal denials based on that phrase, you will need to be armed with scientific proof, veterinary literature, and more to show that the claim *was* medically necessary. If you make a rational appeal, chances are you will win. However, it might take two or three appeals to do so.

**7 Consider the caps.** Some insurers also have incident caps, annual caps, and even lifetime caps on how much they will pay out. We would avoid plans with these caps because you're just setting yourself up for heartache. If chemo treatments cost \$10,000 (very possible), but your per-incident cap is \$5,000, you will have to pay the additional \$5,000 yourself. This is huge. Caps are also likely on wellness/preventative cover-

age, but this seems reasonable. You can pay for additional wellness services.

**8 Understand your responsibilities, too.** Most policies do not cover vaccines, flea-protection, heartworm, and other "normal" preventative measures (unless you have a wellness rider). They will state there is no coverage for a disease preventable by vaccine. However, we noted that they do not list what vaccines are normal or required. Rabies is probably a no-brainer and a core (recommended) vaccine, but what if your dog gets canine flu and you skipped the vaccine? Get a list of what's required.

**9 Check to see if office visits are covered.** A routine veterinarian's office examination is covered by most policies, but not all. Healthy Paws, for example, does not cover office visits; instead, it pays for things that happen at visits, such as diagnostics and surgery. Keep in mind that office visits can range from \$50 to \$250 or more for specialists.

If you're the type who frequently takes your dog to the veterinarian "just in case," you may want to look for a policy that covers these costs.

**10 Review what dental care is covered and what is extra.** Some plans cover routine teeth cleaning by your veterinarian, and some require that you pay for dental insurance in order to cover veterinary cleaning. If your dog develops

### *Options That Are Not Really Insurance*

There are companies like Pet Assure that offer "discount cards" for veterinary services for a low monthly fee. They offer a 25 percent discount if you present the card at "participating" veterinary clinics. However, this is not insurance. You pay the company for negotiating with veterinarians to accept the card. For a lot of the clinics, you may be able to negotiate this rate on your own, especially if you are a frequent customer.

Banfield Pet Hospital offers another option to insurance – a wellness program with various levels of service provided for a flat fee. You select a level of wellness/preventative care that you anticipate needing for a set monthly fee. This provides an incentive to bring your dog into a Banfield clinic for regular wellness exams; the company apparently banks on the likelihood that if your dog does become sick, you will bring him back to Banfield for treatment.

a secondary ailment due to bad teeth, is it covered?

Check, too, to see if your dog is prone to dental disease. Small dogs are especially prone to tartar formation, gum recession, and eventual loss of teeth. In fact, according to the American Kennel Club, a dog like a Yorkshire Terrier is likely to have lost half of his teeth by the time he is 12 years old. And large dogs may fracture teeth from aggressive chewing.

**11 One of the most important things to look for is “continual coverage for chronic conditions.”** Without that, you could find yourself out of luck if your dog gets cancer or diabetes. Make sure that the carrier will not cancel your policy because your dog became chronically ill and that the coverage will continue in full.

**12 Prepare for increases in premiums as the years go on; the older your dog is, the more the insurance company will charge to insure him.** Also, be aware that some companies have a cut-off age – an age at which they will no longer cover a dog.

**13 When you sign up, make sure that you answer all the insurer’s questions honestly.** Before accepting your dog, all of the insurance companies require a veterinary exam, or, at a minimum, a review of your dog’s veterinary records. If you failed to disclose a previous health problem, your insurer may refuse to pay for current or ongoing treatment for that condition and, in the worst-case scenario, you could be charged with insurance fraud.

**14 Keep in mind as you make your decisions that insurance is a risk-based industry.** The insurance company is betting you won’t need their service, while you’re gambling that you might. It’s up to you to decide how much risk you’re willing to take.

**15 Owner of an older dog?** In most cases, you have to enroll your dog in a plan before he reaches a certain age (typically 10 to 14 years). As long as you continue to pay, the companies won’t drop your aging dog. But if your dog is currently too old to be newly enrolled in a reasonably priced policy, is turned down for coverage (considered a poor risk), and/or

if you are extremely disciplined about saving money, you might consider just setting aside funds in a savings account just for your pets. Keep in mind that the account has to be maintained at a hefty balance to cover the amount of medical care you would desire for your dog if he or she were insured. 🐾

*Cynthia Foley is a freelance writer and dog agility competitor in Warners, New York.*

## Pet Health Insurance 101

■ **Accident coverage** covers your pet if he is injured, such as from swallowing something he shouldn’t eat or hitting a hole in the ground at full speed and breaking his leg. Accident-only policies tend to be the ones offered with advertising like, “Cover your dog for less than \$10 a month.” They’re inexpensive because insurance is a risk-associated industry and the chances of your dog being hurt in an accident aren’t as high as him becoming sick.

■ **Alternative and/or complementary treatments** are included in some plans, but most offer it as a rider. The policies are very specific as to what they will cover. Look for things like hydrotherapy, acupuncture, and chiropractic work, which are rapidly gaining ground as viable rehabilitation and pain-control therapies. Most policies specify exactly what they will cover and who may administer the treatment.


■ **Exclusions** will be spelled out, usually in detail, in your policy. It tends to be a very long section. Read it before you sign, and question any vague descriptions. If you can, get your questions answered in writing (one of the great things about email—you can print out the answer and tuck it away with your policy).

■ **Illness coverage** takes care of expenses when your dog is sick. That means things like vomiting, heart problems, and tumor removal. Be careful, though, when it comes to cancer; sometimes the limitations are very specific. Read your contract carefully, especially the exclusions page.

■ **Prescription drug** coverage seems like it should be covered within the accident and/or illness sections, but it isn’t always. You need to ask. Pets Best had a prescription formulary schedule, just like you see in human health insurance, stating what drugs they will cover. No one can predict what your dog might need—nor what new super drug might be released tomorrow—so, if you can avoid these limitations, all the better. Otherwise, you’ll need to have that list with you when you visit your veterinarian to see if there’s a treatment option covered by the insurance.

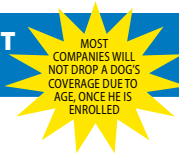
■ **Wellness coverage** means your dog’s routine care, such as screening blood tests, vaccinations, and tests for internal parasites, such as worms and heartworm. Extraordinary care, such as neutering or dental cleaning, may be covered or may be offered only as a rider on your main policy.

## A RANGE OF PRODUCTS FROM THE LEADING PET INSURANCE COMPANIES

INSURANCE CONTACT INFORMATION	COVERAGES AVAILABLE	PRESCRIPTION COVERAGE	DEDUCTIBLES	CO-INSURANCE	
<b>24 PETWATCH</b> (866) 597-2424 24petwatch.com	Accidents, illness, wellness	Yes	\$100 to \$1,000	20%	
<b>AKC</b> (866) 725-2747 akcpetinsurance.com	Accidents, illness, wellness	Yes	\$100 to \$1,000	20%	
<b>ASPCA</b> (888) 716-1203 aspcapetinsurance.com	Accidents, illness, wellness	Yes	\$100 to \$500	10 to 30%	
<b>EMBRACE</b> (800) 511-9172 embracepetinsurance.com	Accidents, illness, wellness	Yes	 \$200 to \$1,000	10 to 30%	
<b>FIGO</b> (844) 493-4130 Figopetinsurance.com	Accidents, illness, wellness	Yes	\$50 to \$500	0 to 30%	
<b>HARTVILLE</b> (800) 799-5852 hartvillepetinsurance.com	Accidents, illness, wellness	Yes	\$100 to \$500	10 to 30%	
<b>HEALTHY PAWS</b> (855) 898-8991 healthypawspetinsurance.com	Accidents, illness, wellness	Yes	\$100 to \$500	10 to 30%	
<b>NATIONWIDE</b> (855) 565-1213 petinsurance.com		Accidents, illness, wellness	Yes	\$250	10%
<b>PET FIRST</b> (855) 270-7387 petfirst.com	Accidents, illness, wellness	Yes	\$50 to \$500	10 to 30%	
<b>PET PLAN</b> (800) 241-8141 gopetplan.com	Accidents, illness	Yes	\$250 to \$1,000	10 to 30%	
<b>PET PREMIUM</b> (800) 935-7280 petpremium.com	Accidents, illness, wellness	Yes	\$100 to \$500	10 to 30%	
<b>PETS BEST</b> (877) 738-7237 petsbest.com	Accidents, illness	Optional	\$50 to \$1,000	10 to 30%	
<b>PREMIER</b> (877) 774-4671 premierpetinsurance.com	Accidents, illness, wellness	Yes	\$50 to \$1,000	10 to 30%	
<b>TRUPANION</b> (855) 210-8749 trupanion.com	Accidents, illness	Yes	0 to \$1,000	10%	

# Nationwide's flat 14-day waiting period (for all conditions), default of uncapped annual limit, and 90% reimbursement of actual costs (not what the insurance company thinks things *should* cost) makes it our favorite.

\* We like this feature, which gives credits to those whose pets have not needed care for illness or injury.



ANNUAL LIMITS	WAITING PERIOD	REIMBURSEMENT METHOD	NEW ENROLLMENT AGE LIMITS
\$1,500 to \$20,000	1 day accidents; 14-30 days illness (2 days on limited illnesses)	Actual cost	8 weeks to 10 years
\$3,000 to \$16,000	3 days accidents; 14 days illnesses; 6 months orthopedic	Usual and customary	8 weeks to 9 years
\$5,000 to unlimited	0 to 14 days	Actual cost	8 weeks to no limit
\$5,000 to \$15,000	2 to 14 days accidents (varies by state); 14 days illness; 6 months orthopedic	Actual cost	Up to age 14
<b>UNLIMITED</b> **	5 days accidents; 14 days illnesses; 6 months orthopedic	Actual cost	8 weeks to no limit
\$5,000 to unlimited	0 to 14 days	Usual and customary	8 weeks to no limit
<b>UNLIMITED</b> **	15 days; 1 year hip dysplasia	Actual cost	8 weeks to 14 years
<b>UNLIMITED</b> **	14 days	Actual cost	Up to age 10
\$2,000 to \$10,000	1 day accidents; 14 days illnesses	Usual and customary	8 weeks to no limit
\$2,500 to unlimited	5 days accidents; 15 days illnesses	Usual and customary	6 weeks and up
\$2,500 to unlimited	14 days	Actual cost	8 weeks to 12 years
\$2,500 to unlimited	3 days accidents; 14 days illnesses; 6 months orthopedic	Actual cost	7 weeks to no limit
\$2,500 to unlimited	3 days accidents; 14 days illnesses; 6 months orthopedic	Actual cost	Not listed
<b>UNLIMITED</b> **	5 days accidents; 30 days illnesses	Actual cost	8 weeks to 14 years

\*\* We have highlighted the companies whose default offerings have no caps on annual coverage. We don't like consumers to have to guess at the maximum amount they might need to save their dogs' lives.



# Clicker Training 101

*You don't actually need a clicker to use this popular type of positive-reinforcement or force-free training.*



*Clickers come in a variety of styles. "Button" clickers are quieter – good for sound-sensitive dogs. Classic "box" clickers are louder and make the most distinct sound.*

Unless you've been living in a cave for the past 20 years, you've probably heard of clicker training. Chances are good you've seen it, and maybe even done it yourself. But on the off chance you haven't, or in case you have but still aren't sure what it's really about, read on.

In 1984, dolphin trainer Karen Pryor published a small book titled *Don't Shoot the Dog*. A small book – but it was destined to accomplish big things. Although intended to address human interactions – to teach people how to use positive reinforcement to change the behavior of other humans – the book was seized upon by the dog-training world (no doubt due to the title) and soon a seismic shift was under way for the Rin Tin Tins and Lassies of the world.

## Not all reward markers "click"

A clicker is a small device that makes a consistent, discrete clicking sound. Some make a very sharp sound; some make a softer (though still consistent) clicking sound, like the sound of a ballpoint pen being retracted or extended with the press of a button. But markers don't have to be a click; any distinctive, consistent sound, gesture, or event can work.

I sometimes use the verbal marker "Yes!" with dogs, in a distinct, consistent, bright tone of voice (so it doesn't get confused with a "yes" spoken in casual conversation). I have also perfected a loud "mouth click" by suctioning my tongue to the roof of my mouth and pulling it off with a resounding "pop" – very useful when working with horses and I want both of my hands free to handle a 1,000-pound animal and related equipment. (Yes, you can clicker train horses, cats, pigs, chickens, fish – just about any animal with a central nervous system.) In fact, dogs who are sound-sensitive may do better with a verbal marker than a plastic clicker.

But the marker doesn't have to be a sound! People who train deaf dogs often use a thumbs-up gesture or a momentary flash of a small flashlight to mark the desired behavior displayed by their canine students. Any signal that is consistent and easily noticed can work as a reward marker.

In the book, Pryor described how a clicker or other conditioned reinforcer could be used to accelerate learning. Dog trainers (in particular) found the methods Pryor described to be easy, fun, and successful; over time, the phrase "clicker training" became a popular slang term for positive reinforcement training that uses a "reward marker" of some sort, and the clicker became the method's emblem.

## CONSISTENT SIGNAL

A reward marker is a reproducible signal that indicates to the training subject that she has just earned a reward of some sort. The reward marker doesn't have to be a clicker; it can be any consistent sound, word, or even a gesture that *always* means a reward is coming.

The reward marker also serves another purpose: It bridges the time gap between the subject's behavior and the delivery of the reinforcing reward. It might take only a second or two to deliver a treat to your dog's lips when he sits in front of you and you have clicked a clicker, but if you are teaching him to turn on a light switch that is across the room, the click of the clicker (or other reward marker) lets him know that flipping the light switch was the behavior that has earned him a reward, which he will enjoy as soon as you go to him or he returns to you!

The secret to the clicker (or any other marker) is this: When beginning training, the marker is paired with a high-value reinforcer (most frequently a food treat) until the dog has made a classically conditioned association between the sound and the treat.

If you use a clicker as your marker, you would create this association initially by clicking the clicker and then immediately feeding the dog a treat. You repeat this a number of times – click, treat; click, treat; click, treat – until your dog's eyes light up when she hears the click and she looks for the treat. We sometimes refer to this process as "charging" the clicker; we've given the click significance, and the dog



understands that the click means a reward is coming.

## CHARGED AND READY

Once you have charged your clicker, you are ready to begin training with it. Now you cue, prompt, lure, or just wait for the dog to perform a certain behavior. The instant that the behavior happens, you click and immediately feed her a treat. After you do this several times, you will see that your dog will quickly come to understand that whatever she was doing when she heard the click is what made the click happen and the food appear. She will also quickly realize that chances are good that if she displays that behavior again, she'll get clicked and treated again.

By the way – you do *not* have to click to reinforce *every* behavior. Remember that the purpose of the click

is to bridge the gap in time between the behavior and the treat, so the dog knows what behavior is being reinforced. Technically, if you are close enough to the dog to deliver the treat immediately after she does the behavior, you don't have to click first. But most "clicker trainers" will testify that the use of a discrete signal seems to help most animals quickly discern and deliver the desired behavior.

The whole premise behind positive reinforcement-based training is that behaviors that are reinforced repeat or increase, and behaviors that are not reinforced extinguish. So, if we are good at reinforcing the behaviors we *do* want, and preventing reinforcement for behaviors we don't want (management!), we end up with a dog who chooses to do behaviors that we like.

The last step in this type of training is to add cues. A cue invites the dog to

do the desired behavior, the marker tells her when she's done it, the reward reinforces it, and voila! Your training is well under way. If you do this process well, punishment, pain, and coercion are totally unnecessary for a successful training program.

## CLICK-TREAT FOREVER?

Does this mean you will always need to click and treat your dog for doing any desirable behavior for the rest of her life? Not at all. You *do* need to provide prompt reinforcement if you use a reward marker; your marker is a *promise* that a reinforcer is coming. In fact, there are studies now that suggest using a marker without a reward (a click, but no treat) can cause your dog's response to deteriorate pretty quickly.

But you *can* put behaviors on a variable schedule of reinforcement (gradually!), so your dog comes to know that eventually a marker and reward will happen. "Lassie, sit! Good girl! ... Lassie, sit! Good girl! ... Lassie, sit!" Click, treat. Like a gambler at a slot machine, if you vary the reinforcement schedule, your dog will keep playing the training game, waiting for it to pay off. But note this: If you get too stingy or reduce reinforcement too quickly, your dog may well quit playing, just as you might if you were sitting at a slot machine that only rarely gave you a small reward.

## TRY IT! YOU WILL LIKE IT

There are now clicker trainers in practically every community in the United States. If you're looking to give it a try and want some help, seek one out. There are also many books and websites that can guide you in your clicker training journey. Ready, set...click! 🐾

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*Author Pat Miller, CBCC-KA, CPDT-KA, and owner of Peaceable Paws Dog & Puppy Training in Fairplay, Maryland, is WDJ's Training Editor. 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 page 24 for contact information, information on her classes for dog owners and trainers, and book purchasing details.*

## Clicker resources

Here are some resources to get you started on your clicker journey:

### BOOKS

*The Power of Positive Dog Training* by Pat Miller

*Clicker Training for Dogs* by Karen Pryor

*The Thinking Dog: Crossover to Clicker Training* by Gail Fisher

### DVDS

*Basic Good Manners* by Pat Miller

*Clicker Puppy* by Doggone Crazy

### YOUTUBE

Search for "clicker training" on Youtube.com; you will find many great examples. We strongly recommend the videos by trainer Emily Larlham at [youtube.com/user/kikopup](https://www.youtube.com/user/kikopup).

### TRAINERS

Look for trainer referrals at the Pet Professional Guild. They may not all be clicker trainers but they are all committed to force-free training, so most of them will be: [petprofessionalguild.com/Zip-Code-Search](https://www.petprofessionalguild.com/Zip-Code-Search).

### CLICKERS

Most pet-supply stores now carry clickers, as do your friendly neighborhood clicker trainers. You can find them easily online as well. In general, the box clickers are louder; the button clickers make a softer sound.

ACTION  
PLAN

# Seriously, Tick: Off!

*Five things to do when you find a tick on your dog.*



*Our favorite tick remover is the Pro-Tick Remedy. It is an aluminum tool that you slide under the tick, catching its head in a little slit at the tip of the tool, and lifting it away. The magnifying glass helps you make sure you removed the whole tick. The tool is available in select pet-supply stores and online.*



It's hard to say which is worse: running your hand over your dog and brushing against an attached tick, or seeing a tick skitter across your dog's face. Either way, the unwelcome arachnid must go. What should you do?

**1 Remove the tick.** If it is walking on your dog, you can grab it with your fingers or use something like a paper towel if you don't want to touch it. If it is attached, you will need to pull it off, making sure that you get the head out of your dog's skin.

There are a variety of tick removers on the market that work well (our favorite is the Pro-Tick Remedy, pictured here). Keep your tick remover somewhere you can easily find it when needed, and read the directions on the package for best results.

If you do not have a tick-remover tool, tweezers will do the trick. Grip the tick's head as close to your dog's skin as possible and slowly pull it out using steady pressure. Don't tear quickly, or you could leave the tick's head behind, which still leaves your dog at risk for contracting a tick-borne disease.

I always flush any ticks that I find to be sure that they are out of my house and space. You can also drown them or put them in the trash in a sealed container (just in case they aren't actually dead). Burning them with a lighter can be satisfying; just do not try to burn the tick while it is still on your dog!

You can also save the tick in a sealed container to show to your veterinarian for identification purposes or to submit for Lyme-disease testing.

**2 Clean the bite area.** Plain old soap and water will work fine, or you can use an alcohol wipe. Cleaning the wound, no matter how small, reduces the risk of secondary bacterial infection.

**3 Check for more ticks.** Where there is one tick, there could easily be more. Go over your dog's entire body checking for any more eight-legged stowaways, including in his

armpits, around his face, and in his ears. A fine-tooth comb can be very useful for getting through a longhaired dog's coat and will catch larger ticks. Also check yourself and any other pets that were in the area where your dog most likely got the tick.

**4 Review your preventatives.** Is your dog on a regular flea and tick preventative? If not, this would be a good time to start. There are a wide variety of options, including topicals, collars, and oral medications. The fleas and ticks in some areas are becoming resistant to some preventives, so even if you have been using a preventative regularly, it may be necessary to switch if you are seeing a significant increase in ticks on your dog.

Consult with your veterinarian before choosing a product to make sure that it will fit your situation. No matter which product you choose, be aware that the vast majority do not actually repel ticks and may require the tick to bite to kill it. Ticks have to be attached for a period of time before tick-borne diseases are transmitted, so killing the tick quickly reduces your dog's risk.

**5 Schedule blood work to check for tick-borne diseases.** It takes several weeks for most tick-borne diseases to be detectable on blood tests, so there is no need to rush to the vet unless your dog starts to show clinical signs of illness. The most common tick-borne diseases that affect dogs can all cause fevers, lethargy, and lameness.

If you live in an area with lots of ticks, screening for tick-borne diseases is a good thing to do as part of your dog's annual appointment to catch any developing issues before they become a major problem. If your dog does become ill or is acting off, mention to your veterinarian that he was bitten by a tick. 🐾

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# Kidding Around

*Combining kids and dogs in your family can be magical and heartwarming, or cause a devastating tragedy. Here's how to boost the odds of the former and prevent the latter.*

**D**ogs and kids really do go together like peanut butter and jelly, and most of the time they live happy lives together without incident.

Sadly, however, this is not always the case, and when things don't go well, they can go very badly indeed. A tragically high percentage of dog-bite and dog-mauling victims are babies and young children. Small humans are far more vulnerable to dog attacks than big humans, given that their faces and throats are right at the level of most canine mouths.

Constant, alert adult supervision could prevent many of these tragedies. However, all too often adults actually *encourage* young children to be inappropriate with dogs because they think it's funny or cute. Supervision is useless if the adults have no more sense than the child.

## IMPROVING THE ODDS

Fortunately, there are many things we can do to improve the odds for safe child-dog interactions, beginning with the dog herself. Ideally, *every* dog should be well socialized with babies and children from puppyhood. Many young adults adopt a pup at a time when children are, if anything, a distant prospect, without seeming to realize that kids could easily arrive within the 10 to 15 years of their dog's lifespan. Even if there will never be children in the dog's immediate family, chances are she will encounter small humans at some point in her life. By convincing her very early on that children are wonderful, you greatly reduce the risk that she will ever feel compelled to bite one.

Note that "well-socialized with babies and children" doesn't just mean having your young dog around kids a lot. It means frequently having your young dog around kids in a carefully controlled environment *and making sure she's having a wonderful time*. The goal is to con-



Photo credit: Susan Lindeman

vince her that great things happen whenever children are present, thereby giving her a very positive classical association with kids.

In contrast, if children are allowed to overwhelm or frighten her, or worse, actually hurt her, you will do the exact opposite; she will have a *negative* classical association that you will have to work very hard to reverse. Start with one well-behaved child at a time, and only increase numbers when the pup is clearly enamored of interactions with one.

If your pup acts cautious or fearful when she first sees children or babies, go even more slowly; the pup already has a negative association that you will have to work to change. Keep the child at a distance while you have happy times with your pup – tasty treats and fun toys and games. *Very* gradually allow the child to come closer, and only when your pup is clearly

*Many adult dog owners trace their love of dogs to a relationship with a special dog in childhood. But many people who are afraid of dogs trace that fear to being bitten by a dog as a child. The good news is that there are many things you can do as a dog-owning parent to cultivate mutually safe, respectful, loving relationships between dogs and kids.*

relaxed and happy. We have a saying in behavior modification: “If you think you’re going too slow... slow down.” Or to quote my friend, trainer Laura Glaser Harrington, “Think crockpot, not microwave.”

If an adult-dog adoption is in the works and there will be children in your world, remember this critically important caveat: *Dogs who are going to be around babies and/or children must adore kids, not just tolerate them.* A dog who adores children will forgive many of the inappropriate things young humans will inevitably do to dogs. A dog who merely tolerates them will not.

If you’re doing a meet-and-greet with a shelter or rescue dog, or looking at a private rehome adoption, take your children with you (or borrow a friend’s if you don’t have your own yet). Your prospective canine family member

should be delighted to see the kids – warm and wiggly, soft eyes, and begging to interact with them. Anything less is just tolerance, and tolerance is really just low-level avoidance – not a good sign. If you adopt a dog who only tolerates children (or worse, finds them very aversive), be prepared for a lifetime of management by putting your dog safely away when children are present.

Changing an association for an adult dog becomes more challenging the longer a dog has had to solidify the association and successfully practice behavior, such as growling or snapping, that keeps scary kids at a distance.

### MANAGE AND SUPERVISE

Even if your dog adores children (and *especially* if she doesn’t!), management and supervision are vitally import-

ant elements of successful dog/baby/child-keeping. Dog training and behavior professionals are well-known for repeating the warning, “*Never* leave dogs and small children together unattended.” Not for a moment. Not while you take a quick bathroom break, or run to the kitchen to grab a snack. Take the dog with you. There are a staggering number of serious child-bite cases where the adult left the room “just for a minute.” (“Small children” are generally considered up to six to seven years old.)

### PRE-BABY PREPARATIONS

If you are planning to start a family, manage your baby’s introduction to the home (and the dog) by doing your advance preparation:

- Classically condition your dog to love babies.

- Make any changes in routine and location well before the baby’s arrival (change is stressful and contributes to aggression and negative association). For example: If your dog sleeps in your bedroom, but won’t after the baby arrives, evict her now and help her adapt to her new sleeping arrangements *months* before the baby comes.

- Teach and reward your dog for a “go to your mat” behavior, so she can lie down quietly near baby activity and not feel shut out.

- Teach the dog to be comfortable when crated or shut in a “safe room,” so she can be removed from activity when needed, without anxiety.

- Bring baby blankets home from the hospital to introduce your dog to the baby’s smell a few days before baby comes home.

- Have the dog well-exercised on arrival day, so there is less excitement. Let Mom come in and greet the dog first while baby stays outside, and then bring baby in, allowing the dog to be calm and relaxed when meeting the new family member.

## Resources for dog-owning parents

There is a wealth of information and resources available to parents who want to successfully raise dogs and kids together. Here are some of our favorites:

### APP

**DogDecoder:** Helpful, clear information on reading and understanding dog body language

### BOOKS

*Living With Dog and Kids Without Losing Your Mind* by Colleen Pelar

*A Kid’s Comprehensive Guide to Speaking Dog!* By Niki Tudge

*Please Don’t Bite the Baby (and Please Don’t Chase the Dog)* by Lisa Edwards (half memoir, half training guide)

### VIDEO

[tinyurl.com/toddler-feed-dog](http://tinyurl.com/toddler-feed-dog): Very good video showing appropriate management and interaction between a young child and a dog

### WEBSITES

[familypaws.com](http://familypaws.com): Excellent website with tons of info on dogs and toddlers, including resources and programs

[doggonessafe.com](http://doggonessafe.com): Another highly informative website with lots of info on households with dogs and kids

[aspcapetcare.org/pet-care/dog-care/dogs-and-babies](http://aspcapetcare.org/pet-care/dog-care/dogs-and-babies): Good info on dogs and babies

[pleasedontbitethebaby.com](http://pleasedontbitethebaby.com): Good blogs on life with dogs and babies

[Ispeakdog.org](http://Ispeakdog.org): Excellent website on reading and understanding dog body language

## CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Here are some generalizations about child development and how it may affect your dog. It's very important that children are taught at a young age how to be appropriate with dogs and are not allowed or encouraged to tease them. Of course, every child is an individual, so each developmental stage must be addressed as appropriate for that child:

■ **0-6 months:** Prior to the age of six months, a baby's cries can trigger a predatory response in some dogs, and this is believed to be the cause of many dog-baby tragedies. Although predatory behavior is not truly aggression, the result to the victim can be just as devastating. Manage and supervise.

■ **6-24 months:** When a baby becomes mobile, there is a much greater likelihood that she will intrude into the dog's space, and the dog may become defensively aggressive. Some dogs who are fine with babies at first get pretty uncomfortable when the strange little human starts to move around. Manage and supervise.

■ **2-5 years:** At this age, young humans start to become more independent and are likely to deliberately pursue and even pester the dog, trying to take her toys, interfering while she's eating, chase her, and fondle or pull on canine body parts. They may want to snuggle with, hug, or kiss the dog, who may not

be willing to reciprocate. Children also start having friends over – more kids to watch! Manage and supervise.

■ **5-9 years:** Children continue to want to interact with the dog and are more likely to deliberately tease, try to boss the dog around, reprimand, or punish, and roughhouse – especially if they see these behaviors modeled by adult humans in the home. Children at the upper end of this age range may begin to take some responsibility for feeding, grooming, and exercising the dog, and do not require as much management and supervision.

■ **9-12 years:** At this age, kids should be beyond the need for constant supervision, but still need to be monitored to ensure appropriate interactions. They may still tend to tease, roughhouse, or even abuse the dog. Monitor.

## TRAINING

The more promptly and happily your dog responds to your cues, the easier life is with kids and dogs. A cheerful "Settle!" cue keeps the dog from playing uncomfortably close to the baby. (See "Give it a Rest," WDJ September 2015.) If the pacifier pops out of the baby's mouth onto the floor, a timely "Leave it!" can prevent a spontaneous game of "keep away" and save the day. (See "Request for Leave," August 2008.) If you see your dog getting too excited when your son is roughhousing with his friends in the backyard, a really reliable recall can be a blessing. (See "Rocket Recalls," September 2012.)

Training can also help keep your dog from feeling ignored by all the attention paid to the newcomer. Have at least one family member continue regular training with her – attending classes if possible, keeping her responses to cues tuned up, as well as keeping her brain busy. Show your child how

*Alert supervision and swift action is a must to prevent children from doing inappropriate things that could hurt or startle even the nicest dog into snapping. Look for expressions and body language that tell you the dog is uncomfortable and help him out.*

## What you can do

- *Be a responsible dog-owning parent – always be present and supervise interactions between your dog and your young child.*
- *Teach your children well. Help your child understand at an early age what's appropriate behavior with dogs.*
- *Make wise adoption and training choices if you plan to have children in your life.*

to properly ask for and reinforce your dog's good-manners behaviors (if your dog doesn't take treats delicately, have your toddler toss the treats on the ground, or just say "Good dog!" while you dispense the treats). At the age of around seven, your child will be ready to actively participate in training as well, which will also improve or maintain a good relationship between dog and kid.

## BODY LANGUAGE

We would be remiss if we didn't also include a discussion of canine body language. All the supervision in the world isn't going to help if you're standing next to your dog and she is very uncomfortable with the attentions of the child who is petting her. A bite can happen *that* fast, and even though you are *right there*, you won't be quick enough to stop it. The better you are at reading dog body language, the better prepared you'll be to intervene and protect both child *and* dog before it's too late. (For more information on canine body language, see "Listen by Looking," August 2011.)

Meanwhile, don't let the horror stories scare you. Millions of children live happily ever after with their canine pals. Yours can too, as long as you raise them both with common sense, good management, and supervision. 🐾

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CASE  
HISTORY

# Excitable Boy

*Sometimes, trying to tire a hyperactive dog is the exact opposite of what he needs.*



*Indy is a beautiful dog, but his behavior started out as energetic and anxious and progressed rapidly to downright dangerous.*

Half a year ago, some former clients contacted me regarding Indy, their 18-month-old Australian Shepherd, asking if I could take him for boarding and training. The dad was about to leave the country for eight weeks, and the mom had her hands full with Indy, a challenging toddler, and a new baby.

Indy was what many consider a “hyperactive” dog, busy all the time and difficult to manage. My clients loved him, but found it exhausting to raise him.

Indy is one of the smartest dogs I’ve ever had the honor of caring for and training. It seems like he’s always thinking about what’s next, whether we are in the car, at home, or anywhere else. He’s thinking about how much fun he can have – and he wants to engage anyone near him to join him in his follies. But he’s not just anticipating; he also has a prodigious memory of places, events, and objects, and his memories trigger excitement anew.

Unfortunately, all of that energy, excitement, and anticipation ultimately resulted in a dog who was in a constant state of hyperarousal. He was reactive on leash and aggressive with dogs he didn’t know. He was constantly on the go and unable to focus in the face of any distractions. Worse, he started growling at the family’s toddler. The last straw for the family

*When he played with other dogs, Indy would get over-aroused and escalate into aggression within minutes.*



was when he bit the gardener, someone he was familiar with, while the gardener was operating a leaf blower.

He never seemed to tire, either. His guardians handed him over with the comment, “Good luck trying to wear him out.”

## EXERCISING HYPERACTIVE DOGS

There is a widespread notion that the ideal way to manage hyperactive dogs is to try to tire them out, with treadmills, endless games of fetch, paid dog-runners, and so forth. I tend to disagree. I think less is more when it comes to dogs like Indy.

It’s true that dogs like Australian Shepherds, a breed commonly referred to as “high drive” and thought of as “needing to work,” enjoy hard exercise. But while I believe that every dog benefits from having a job, I think less work is better for these especially smart, active, and sensitive individuals, particularly in their first three years. In my opinion, it’s far more valuable to teach dogs like this to settle themselves, instead of trying to physically exhaust them. And forget about employing the “forced settle” method – an oxymoron that leaves the dog no choice in the matter and often exacerbates the dog’s so-called hyperactivity.

Some dogs get labeled as hyperactive as puppies; others, like Indy, get characterized this way in adolescence. Usually, guardians of energetic puppies and adolescents hope that their dogs will grow out of this hard-to-manage phase. In my experience, if these pups don’t have their needs met with appropriate training, exercise, and adequate rest, they grow into it, except with more size, endurance, and vigor.

The term “hyperactive” is commonly used today, but without much precision or understanding. I’d define it as abnormally or extremely active. Usually, when I meet a dog who is consistently referred to as hyperactive, what I see is a dog whose hyperactivity has advanced into a mode of hyperarousal – a physiologically aroused state characterized by heightened, overexcited reactions. Hyperarousal has nothing to do with sexuality; the state is

more akin to a “fight or flight” mode. A dog who is in a state of hyperarousal often has little or no ability to calm himself down.

I believe that when hyperactive dogs don't have their needs met, they often begin to present with behaviors typical of hyperarousal; they get overexcited when playing or greeting people or dogs (or just seeing them at a distance), and are unable to focus when triggered. Unfortunately, people often unintentionally reinforce these behaviors. When a dog paws at you, whines for attention, continuously drops toys in your lap, etc., it's natural to pay attention to him, whether by getting frustrated and angry with his relentless pestering and yelling at him (or worse),

or by petting him or throwing the toy for him.

The latter tactic is common; most of us have heard that the best way to deal with a high-energy dog is to exercise him very well and keep him highly stimulated. Right? Wrong!

When dogs engage in a physically demanding activity like playing fetch, hunting, herding, or even just playing hard at the dog park, their adrenaline and cortisol levels spike upward. Many dogs seem to find the continual release of these hormones enjoyable – the feeling may even be addictive. (And what do most of us do when faced with a “fetch addict”? We throw the ball or Frisbee for them!)

Hyperactive dogs aren't born this

way. Yes, genetics and breed must be taken into account, but if we teach them healthy, appropriate behaviors during puppyhood, we can help them grow into less anxious dogs.

Anxious? Yes. Remember, dogs who exhibit hyperarousal behaviors are in a constant or chronic state of physiological arousal, unable to settle, even when put in a crate for “down time.”

Crating the dog may give his handler a break, but if you let the dog out and he immediately goes back to his relentless shenanigans, you will see that the time in the crate (or forcing a “settle” on a mat or on his bed) hasn't helped relieve his anxiety, it's just squelched it temporarily.



## SIZING UP THE PROBLEM

I observed that when I threw a flying disc for Indy to fetch – his favorite game – after about six throws, he was panting really hard. It became clear that the panting was due to stress and hyperarousal behavior, not tired from over exercise.

Indy's guardians had done more to address Indy's hyperactive behavior than many people might have. They taught him lots of good-manners behaviors and tricks, and gave him tons of exercise. They frequently took him hiking, and even arranged for him to herd sheep with a herding trainer (who also said he was the smartest dog she had worked with!).

I knew there was only a small window of time to turn things around with Indy. If he didn't learn to feel less anxious physically and mentally by the time he reached maturity (about three years of age), there was a good chance he would bite again. But if I could find a way to relieve his anxiety, he stood a chance of leading a good life, not causing harm to any other person or dog. I agreed to take him for an extended period of boarding and training.

## REHABILITATION BEGINS

For the first few days, I didn't do anything but allow Indy to adjust to his new environment while observing him and how he moves through his world.

I wanted to see what got him excited and how he calmed himself – or if he could calm himself.

I watched how he responded to cues, my dogs, and me. I observed his eating, potty, and sleeping habits. He revealed more of who he is each day.

When Indy came to me, he was on a high-end commercial diet, and his stools were almost always too soft – an indicator of stress. I switched him over to a home-prepared raw-food diet and monitored his stool. Within about two weeks, his stool had firmed up nicely.

After four days of observation, I began some low-key training sessions with Indy, sometimes in a group with my other two dogs and sometimes with Indy alone. For the first three weeks, I limited the sessions to a maximum of five minutes apiece, about four times a day. During these first three weeks, we practiced tricks, obedience cues, and did agility exercises with agility equipment in my yard.

Because of Indy's bite history, I also worked to accustom him to happily and comfortably wear a muzzle. Having a muzzle on him initially helped keep me relaxed when out in public and keep my other dogs safe, but after about two weeks, I felt it was no longer needed.



*Teaching reactive dogs to happily wear a muzzle keeps everyone safe.*

I gave Indy lots of enrichment activities during those first few weeks. I hid toys for him to find (scent games) and gave him food-stuffed puzzle toys to work on.

We played fetch with a flying disc

*Indy sleeping with author/trainer Jill Breitner's other two dogs. He no longer jumps up out of a light sleep every few minutes.*



– his favorite game – only once a day, and only for about five or six throws. I did not want him to have any opportunities to wind himself up into a state of hyperarousal.

When we weren't interacting in one of these activities, Indy was free to do whatever he wanted – and at first, what he wanted to do most was try to engage me in all the ways his owners had complained about. Whatever he did, I ignored.

The first tactic he tried was to go to the door, asking to go out; if he was outside, he would bark or whine to be let back in. This was his way of trying to initiate play, fetching, and training. But as long as I knew that his needs had already been met – he had gone potty, had exercised, and had some attention and training – I did not let him in or out or engage with him in any way. It took him a couple of weeks to stop trying to engage me, dropping toys at my feet, whining for attention, aimlessly wandering around looking for something to do.

As annoying as all that activity was, I didn't force him to settle anywhere. He had free roam of the areas where I was, in my home. There were toys, safe chews, and puzzle toys at his disposal, so it wasn't like he didn't have ways to entertain himself; he just never learned how. He only knew how to engage, not to settle on his own.

In the beginning, he would settle for a minute or two and then jump right back up and get right back to vying for attention. Eventually, he would settle for about five minutes before getting up and pacing around. I ignored him. The settle period grew to 15 minutes.

Within a month, he learned to rest peacefully without pestering me for anything. He finally started getting the rest that's required for dogs of any age, especially puppies, and didn't need to engage or be busy all the time.

Touch is a much needed and often overlooked part of caring for dogs. Cuddling is wonderful, but what I'm talking about is purposeful, loving touch, like massage or TTouch. When I started massaging Indy, he wasn't sure what was happening and tried to engage in play by playfully biting my hands. But after about five minutes of low-energy massage, with no talking or eye contact, with me just paying focused attention to his body with a gentle, intentional touch, his eyes would soften, he would begin blinking, and we would both fall into a blissful state of complete relaxation.

As he was adjusting to his new life, I would massage him first thing in the morning, every evening, and in many short sessions throughout the day. At first Indy didn't like to be brushed. After all this gentle massage and handling, when I take out the brush, he rolls over for it.

### NEXT PHASE

In a month's time Indy had made great strides. But I knew him well enough at that point to believe that he might never fit into his first family very well. While his response to meeting people was much improved, he could still be startled by people who behaved unpredictably – and if there is anyone who behaves unpredictably, it's a toddler who also has behavior issues. The family had enough challenges even without Indy in the home.

After a lengthy conversation, we all agreed that I would find another home for Indy when the time was right. The decision to let Indy go was not an easy one for this family, but they wanted what was best for him and realized that they couldn't provide for his special needs at this juncture.

Reducing Indy's high anxiety around leaf blowers was a significant accomplishment. Since Frisbee was



his toy and game of choice, I used it to teach him that leaf blowers weren't something to be afraid of and the people who handle them weren't either. I would position a leaf blower in my yard, and throw the Frisbee a time or two. I would then turn the blower on and throw the Frisbee another time or two. If he remained calm, I'd pick up the blower and throw the flying disc a final time or two.

After a few weeks of this, he no longer reacted to the blower or me when I used it. Changing Indy's association with the blower from fear and anxiety to indifference by playing Frisbee with him near the blower worked wonders.

Later, I invited a friend whom Indy hadn't met to come and use the blower while I played Frisbee with Indy at a slight distance. I moved slowly and kept the game very calm to keep Indy from getting triggered and going "over threshold." Don't underestimate the power of play when working on changing behaviors! It worked exceedingly well.

### WELL ON HIS WAY

I've had Indy for almost four months now. He is no longer reactive on leash or aggressive with other dogs or people while out and about. He can walk on a



six-foot leash or a long line and has a near-perfect recall in the face of distractions. He will wait and watch dogs, people, bicyclists, or any of his past triggers without a reaction. And – you probably have already guessed – I've decided that his permanent home is with me.

I wholeheartedly agree that appropriate stimulation of mind and body is healthy for dogs. But I think it's even more important for these hyperactive dogs to get a lot of uninterrupted rest and deep sleep during their first couple

*Flying discs will always be Indy's favorite toy. But now they can be used to reinforce good behavior, rather than triggering hyperarousal.*

of years – *with* their guardians, *not* left in crates, pens, or tethered on mats. If we don't allow a ton of time for rest with us, they never learn how to turn it off, by themselves or in our presence.

Indy is coming up to his second birthday. When he came to me, he exhibited seven of 11 behaviors that are classic symptoms of hyperarousal (see "Hyperarousal" graphic, page 15). I'm thrilled to say that, today, his formerly chronic anxiety is gone. He's finally getting his needs met, with the adequate rest that's required for dogs of any age, especially puppies, and doesn't need to engage or be busy all the time. As he learned to rest on his own and enjoy the much-needed rest and deep sleep his body required, the unwanted hyperarousal behaviors began to subside and today, he doesn't exhibit any of them.

Given his age, though, he's still a work in progress. To maintain his emotional healing and well being, I will have to manage his environment and activities carefully, but it will be worth it, to spend time with this special dog and watch as he matures into a solid adult dog companion.

When Indy wants attention today, it looks much different than it used to. He'll approach me quietly, staring at me until I look at him. If I reach out my hand, he will come close enough to be petted, calmly standing with a wiggly Aussie tail and butt and soft blinking eyes. Then, he will lay at my feet, resting peacefully. 🐾

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## When Rehoming a Dog Is Best

When we bring a dog into our lives and home, our goal is to have a lifelong partner. The thought of living without them is not something we want to consider. However, sometimes circumstances present things we never could have anticipated. Sometimes, it turns out that "the dog of our dreams" does not actually fit comfortably into our family; sometimes, our families are not right for our dog! As their advocates, at that point, we should try to do what's best for the dog.

In considering what's best, we need to try to honestly determine whether the dog is thriving, whether our family is thriving, or if we are all just scraping by in survival mode because we are afraid to admit our failure to successfully integrate the dog into our family.

Making a commitment to the dogs we bring into our lives must be taken seriously, yet there are times when keeping a dog can be a big mistake for all involved. Guilt or feeling like a failure must never be a reason for keeping a dog when he may have a better opportunity to thrive, not just survive, in another family.

Love is unlimited. Rehoming a dog doesn't mean we don't love them; it actually means we love them so much that we want them to live the best life they can.



# Smells Like Teen Spirit

*What to expect during your dog's adolescence.*

Just about everyone knows to be prepared to deal with crazy/relentless *puppy* behavior, but way fewer dog owners, it seems, have been warned about the *other* challenging period in a dog's life: adolescence! A quick Google search on the topic produces results peppered with words like “surviving,” “dealing with,” and “misbehavior.” These pages offer up a long list of things that can go wrong, and suggest it will be more than difficult to get through. Goodness, it sounds horrible!

It's true that this period involves a ton of changes to your dog's biological, physical, and psychological makeup. By extension, his behavior is affected. It's also true that there are times when this transformation is accompanied by some challenging moments. But rest assured it's not all doom and gloom! For every challenging feature of canine adolescence, there is an equally awesome element that makes this a very special time.

The adolescent period typically begins around six months of age, and will be over when a dog reaches physical maturity around two to three years old. The most pronounced behavioral issues will be noticed between six to 12 months old.

Keep in mind that although hormones have

a lot to do with adolescent changes, they're not the only thing responsible for some of the behaviors you may see (even neutered dogs will exhibit these behaviors). Your dog's brain is growing and developing, and the apparent quirkiness of the process is all perfectly natural.

As a trainer and a person who is currently in the adolescent trenches with my Border Terrier, Bennigan, I can testify that it's not all bad. Here are some facts about canine adolescence that you may not be aware of, and some tips that, I hope, will help guide you through this challenging time with your “teenaged” dog.

## ■ The foundation of your relationship with your dog is taking shape and getting stronger.

If you've had your adolescent dog since puppyhood, time has been on your side. You've had several months to get to know each other and to build a bond. That's a very good thing. It's always much easier to forgive and to exercise patience with someone (or a dog) we care deeply about. So while puppyhood antics may have pushed your buttons and left you scrambling for a moment's peace for several weeks in a row, adolescent shenanigans can be surprisingly easier to tolerate, thanks to that bond.

You'll still need to draw deeply from the patience pool during this time, but by now your dog will have improved in other departments: He'll know some basic cues thanks to your training; he'll be housetrained; and his needs won't always require an immediate response on your part, like when he was a young pup.

## ■ Teething is on its way out.

Most of the really difficult teething phase occurs before adolescence, and while it doesn't really wrap up until about seven to nine months old (on average), it's not nearly as dramatic as the earlier stages. Some dogs remain power chewers throughout their adult life, however, and it's important to evaluate and adjust the types of chew toys you're giving your adolescent dog.

What was suitable for a five-month-old puppy might no longer represent a safe option for your dog's newer and more powerful jaw. For

*A puppy's molars erupt between four and six months of age. Once the molars are fully erupted, the adolescent dog's obsession with chewing should begin to wane.*



example, if it used to take him an hour to work his way through a bully stick several weeks ago, it might now only last him 10 minutes and he should be watched closely. Or he may now be able to chew off chunks of a chew stick that previously he could barely dent.

■ **Your dog has a new sleeping schedule.** Remember when your puppy used to spend more time asleep than awake? Yes, well. Those days are gone. Your adolescent dog now seems to have access to an endless supply of energy! If you arm yourself with lots of short, fun training sessions and brain games, you'll fare much better than if you rely solely on physical exercise to tire out your young dog. Besides, you'll want to avoid any serious physical activity that involves sudden stops and turns, or jumps and bounces. Your dog's skeletal structure isn't quite done taking shape yet, and you'll want to protect his joints until at least 12-18 months of age, depending on his size. (Speak to your vet for advice about this.)

Back to sleeping: Your teen dog will very likely experience some disruptions in his nighttime sleeping pattern, which means you'll also experience a few sleepless nights. He might snooze the entire evening away, and just when you're ready to call it a night at 11 pm, he's suddenly wide awake and ready to party! There's little you can do to convince him to settle down. Don't worry. These episodes will come and go, and all that's needed is a little bit (okay, a lot) of patience and time.

■ **Socialization needs to continue.** You've done a wonderful job socializing your pup during the sensitive socialization period (before 12-16 weeks of age), but it shouldn't stop now that your dog is a teenager. Even if you've just adopted an adolescent dog and his socialization history is unknown, it's important to continue to carefully expose your dog to different places, people, other dogs, and different situations (like riding in the car) while associating these events with something positive.

You might notice that your dog

may quite suddenly appear wary or even fearful of things or situations that he previously had no issue with. This is normal. These moments will come and go several times during adolescence and may last anywhere from a couple of days to a few weeks. He may give a scary fire hydrant a very wide berth during your walk, or he might decide that new people or dogs (or trees, or shadows) should be barked at.

Don't worry. Handle these moments with calm and patience, and understand that your dog isn't always able to control his emotions during these phases. Don't push or force him to "confront his fear," and don't scold him for what may look like rude behavior. Give him time to process whatever spooked him. If he wants to turn away and avoid the scary thing, that's fine. If he barks at it, that's fine, too. Often, just crouching next to him and talking with a gentle voice is enough to calm the barking.

Some people "lay low" when they notice their dog is experiencing a fearful phase, opting to avoid situations that cause their dog stress, like busy streets or large crowds (such as a fair or a dog sporting event). When their dog shows signs he's feeling more confident, activities resume as normal.

■ **He's more interested in going for a walk.** Many young puppies balk at wandering too far away from the safety of home. They'll take a few steps on-leash and then will suddenly slam on the brakes and stand still like a statue. Nature designs them this way, for good reason. Adolescence serves to create just the opposite: A biological urge to wander further from the nest and to explore new places. You'll notice your adolescent dog also has more stamina to keep up with you during daily walks, and that he enjoys investigating the various scents.

Adventures with your dog now become a lot more fun. Resist the urge to let him off-leash, unless you're in a safely fenced area. Remember that he's genetically predisposed to explore! His recall isn't nearly as reliable as it was when he was a puppy (very normal), so



*Keep introducing your adolescent dog to kids, old people, and people who look different from you and your family.*

don't count on how good he was just a few weeks ago. Use a long leash if you want to give him more freedom. Keep practicing calling him back to you and reward him with a very yummy treat every time he comes. You'll want to maintain this high rate of reinforcement until he's an adult.

Speaking of unreliable cues...

■ **His training seems to come and go.** Remember how proud you were of your puppy's training results? How quickly he learned to sit, to lie down, to come, to leave it, to drop it, etc.? Where did all of those skills go? If it seems as though your dog has forgotten all of his training, don't worry – he hasn't. The information is still there, floating around in that rapidly developing brain of his. He's just having a bit of trouble accessing all that knowledge right now. This too will return to normal when he's done with the teenage phase. Keep teaching, keep rewarding, and keep breathing. All of your efforts will pay off later. 🐾

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*Nancy Tucker, CPDT-KA, is a full-time trainer, behavior consultant, and seminar presenter in Quebec, Canada. Her Border Terrier, Bennigan, is smack dab in the middle of adolescence. See page 24 for contact information.*



# Are You Allergic to Your Best Friend?

*As many of our readers can attest, you don't have to "get rid of the dog." Here are management techniques to keep symptoms at bay.*



that is less likely to freely release dead hair into the environment, such as the Bichon Frise, are often easier for people with dog allergies to tolerate. Such dogs might be referred to as "hypoallergenic," meaning they have less allergens than the average dog.

Certain breeds are less likely to trigger symptoms in allergy-prone individuals, but people who are especially sensitive may still experience a reaction when interacting with low-shedding breeds because the reaction is caused by the protein, not the coat itself.

## DOG ALLERGY-MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

What's a dog-loving allergy sufferer to do? We reached out to readers who choose to share their lives with dogs despite having allergies to them, and asked how they

manage their allergy symptoms. Here's what we learned:

■ **Avoid carpet in favor of hard floors.** Carpet fibers can easily trap microscopic dander, especially in high-pile carpeting. If you do have carpeting, vacuum often using a machine with a high efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter. With extreme allergies, wear a mask when vacuuming, as the cleaning process can stir up allergens that have settled in the fibers. Frequent steam cleaning is also recommended.

Anti-allergen carpet sprays and shampoos can help neutralize allergens in the environment. On hard floors, invest in a good steam cleaner and consider getting a robot vacuum to run throughout the day (or at night, whenever you are less likely to be nearby) to help keep allergens to a more manageable level.

*Sally, a six-year-old German Shorthaired Pointer, belongs to JP and Amy Frary, in Alameda, California. Amy is extremely allergic to dogs, but wouldn't dream of living without one – just one, though. When there are two dogs in the house, she has noticed, her allergies increase exponentially. Amy copes by keeping the floors bare and clean, washing Sally's bed frequently, washing her hands after petting Sally, and taking allergy medicine.*

Studies show owning a dog can decrease stress, lower cholesterol and blood pressure, combat feelings of loneliness, and encourage people to get more exercise. But when you're the estimated one in 10 allergy sufferers who react to dog-related allergens, life with dogs is a mix of spectacular and sneezes.

Those of us who struggle with allergies of any type can thank our immune system for its tendency to over-react to certain perfectly harmless things in the environment. In the case of an allergic reaction to dogs, the body is reacting to harmless proteins in the dog's urine, saliva, or dander.

Because the allergic reaction is triggered by the protein, the truly "non-allergenic" dog is a mythical creature. Breeds known for less shedding, either due to lack of an undercoat, such as Poodles, or with an overall coat texture

■ **Ditch the dry dusting.** For an allergy sufferer, feather dusters are the devil's plaything! Dry dusting simply relocates dust and other allergens throughout the environment. Instead, dust with a damp cloth. Keep surface areas as uncluttered as possible (fewer nooks and crannies where allergens can settle), and if it's really bad, don't forget to occasionally wipe down walls. Allergens are sticky!

■ **Cover the furniture.** Thankfully slipcovers have come a long way from the early plastic variety of the 1950s. Whether it's a fitted slipcover or a spare bedsheet, covering upholstered furniture and frequently washing the covers can be a life saver for allergy sufferers, as it's much harder to extract allergens from the upholstery itself.

■ **Protect your sleeping area.** If your allergies are really severe, designate your bedroom as a "no pets" zone, even keeping the door closed to limit the amount of airborne allergens that waft their way into your sleeping area. Wash main bedding often, and consider investing in anti-allergen bedding, especially for the difficult-to-clean pieces like the mattress and box springs, and the pillows, since they're closest to your face.

■ **Invest in a quality air cleaner.** The Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America recommends running an air purifier at least four hours per day to help minimize allergy symptoms. Adding a HEPA filter to central air and heating units can also help remove allergens from the air.

■ **Feed the best diet for your dog.** Diet affects a dog's skin and coat. A poor diet can lead to dry, itchy skin. The more the dog scratches as a result,

*A number of people reported that a robot vacuum can significantly cut down the amount of dog hair and dander in the house. However, we were advised to warn readers that these devices must be emptied frequently.*

the more allergens that are released into the environment.

■ **Bathe as needed and brush often.** Allergists agree keeping a dog clean will help temporarily reduce the allergen load, both in terms of pet dander and other environmental allergens that might collect on the coat, but overall, the benefit is short-lived. Plus, bathing too frequently can cause dry skin, which leads to more scratching. We recommend bathing sparingly. Some readers reported success with the Nature's Miracle Allergen Blocker line, a collection of sprays and pet wipes designed to neutralize allergens on contact. A quick look on Amazon shows numerous positive reviews for the products.

Daily brushing, done outdoors whenever possible, can also help reduce allergens by removing pet hair before it has a chance to drop in the environment.

■ **Clean up your act.** Changing clothes after prolonged interaction with a dog, washing your hands often, and even swabbing exposed skin with witch hazel after contact can help lessen an allergic reaction.

■ **Consider limiting your "pack" to one dog, or very small dogs.** The less total canine surface area that there is in the house, the fewer allergens will be

present. Someone would have to have life-threatening allergies before we'd recommend not having dogs at all. But having one short-haired dog, or one whose coat is hypoallergenic, may be tolerable to people who can't handle living with two or more dogs.

■ **Medicate as needed!** Fortunately, people who suffer from allergies have numerous over-the-counter medications to choose from, along with the option of exploring prescription medication and immunotherapy. Many readers reported a need to experiment a bit when it comes to finding the right medication regimen to best keep symptoms at bay, so if one brand of allergy medication isn't working, consider trying something else. For some people, a more natural approach, including herbal remedies and/or acupuncture, is beneficial.

Nobody likes to turn into a wheezing, watery-eyed mess when in the company of their best friend. Fortunately, for many people, a few lifestyle changes, a penchant for cleanliness, and some natural or pharmaceutical support (as needed) means we can still enjoy life with our four-legged friends. And that's nothing to sneeze at! 🐾

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



Photo credit: Dreamstime.com

# Letters and Corrections

It seems that every year when we compile our “Approved Dry Dog Foods” list in the February issue that we accidentally leave a company that we admire off the list. Well, this year we somehow left off *two*: Annamaet and Zignature. We regret the omission.

We have included information about both companies’ offerings below. We have inserted this into the online version of the approved foods list so you can see where these companies’ foods fit into the complete list, which was presented this year in descending order by the average price per pound of the companies’ foods.

Judging by the mail we have received so far, ordering the list this way (as opposed to our usual alphabetical method), was unpopular with our

readers. Many were frustrated by how long it took them to find their favorites.

We thought readers might find it interesting to know which foods are the most expensive products on the market and which are the least expensive foods that are on our approved foods list. We also thought that readers might be interested to learn which products are in the same price “ballpark” as the foods they feed their dogs. Okay; though we might include the average price per pound in our food coverage again in the future, we’ll return to an alphabetical list next year.

Interestingly, a number of people have commented that it would be more helpful to them if we would rank the foods – to list them in order of “quality.” The thing is, this year’s list, with

the foods ordered by average price per pound, probably comes closer to doing that than any list we’ve created in the past 20 years. As we often say, you can’t buy filet mignon at hamburger prices; the use of top-quality ingredients (especially from certified organic, humane, and/or sustainable sources) necessarily results in higher-priced foods.

What some people seem to want us to do is something we can’t do: tell them which foods are “best” for their dog. Only your dog can “tell you” that, by his response to the foods you feed him. *All of the products on our list are great foods.* Choose some that are in your price range, see how your dog responds, and switch to another if he doesn’t thrive. – *Editor*

PRODUCT NAME Company Information	Average Price/lb.	# Varieties, # Grain-Free	Meat, Meal, or Both?	Range of Protein Content Range of Fat Content	Notes
<b>ANNAEET</b> Telford, PA (888) 723-0367; annamaet.com	\$2.47	11, 5 GF	Most meal, 2 both	Min. 23% - 33% protein Min. 7% - 20% fat	Nine out of Annamaet’s 11 foods are made with meat meal; two of its five grain-free foods are made with meat and meal. All of its foods now contain a sustainable algae source of omega-3 fatty acids.
<b>ZIGNATURE</b> Pets Global, Valencia, CA (888) 897-7207; zignature.com	\$2.35	11 GF	Both	Min. 25% - 32% protein Min. 14% - 18% fat	The offerings from Zignature are particularly helpful for feeding dogs with known food allergies, since 10 of its 11 foods contain a single novel species of animal protein (the 11th, Zsential, contains four animal species). Also, all of its foods are free of grain, potato, and chicken.

**I just wanted to thank you with all my heart** for “The Puppy Raising Challenge” (WDJ Nov. 2017).

I had a frustrating, exhausting, miserable day yesterday and today with my 12-week-old mini goldendoodle and was about to tear my hair out after he almost choked on his eleventh acorn today. I was feeling very much alone and that I had made a terrible decision to get this puppy at my age (68). The house is a mess, laundry is piling up, nothing is getting done, and I didn’t even get the “puppy socialization list” even nearly done and he is 12 weeks

today, so I missed my chance for the perfect puppy. Guilt, guilt, guilt!

I happened to see the November WDJ sitting under the huge pile of unopened mail and Christmas catalogs and somehow saw the puppy article highlighted on the front page. I stuck my little guy in his crate and collapsed in a chair and read it.

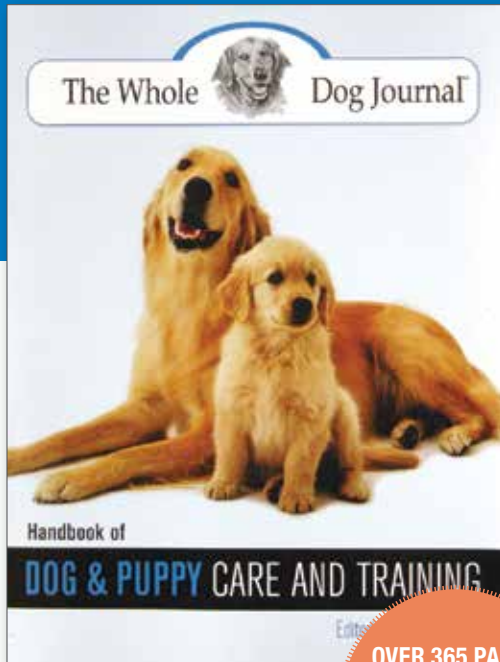
A rainbow suddenly appeared in my kitchen. I felt SO much better – like I wasn’t a total failure and somebody actually understood what I was going through. And maybe I can do this after all! And it is *okay* that Lorenzo hasn’t

met farm animals yet!

Thank you so much for that article. It really gave me the boost I needed to plow ahead and made me feel like I am *not* the worst puppy mama in the world. You really made a difference to someone who needed you today.

**MARCIA KELLER**  
Lyme, New Hampshire

*You are welcome! We hope you will also find it helpful to read author/trainer Nancy Tucker’s article in this issue, on what to expect during your pup’s adolescence! 🐾*



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### ▶ Hemangiomas

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