



Problem Behaviors in Dogs (And How To Deal With Them)

Dogs are very instinctual creatures. They have ingrained behaviors that date back to cave days. Some of these behaviors we humans can find to be annoying. Let's take a look at three of the most common behaviors that can get a dog into trouble.

Chewing

It is very natural for a dog to want to chew. Make sure your dog has plenty of appropriate chew toys that are accessible for him to chew. There are numerous, acceptable alternatives at your local pet super center. In addition to supplying your dog with appropriate chews, you can also take these measures:

- Keep small toys and objects off the floor.
- Use a product like bitter apple to deter your dog from chewing on the inappropriate – it's safe and most dogs don't like the taste. You can find this, or a similar product at the pet store.
- When you catch pup chewing on an inappropriate item, take the item away, and say a stern "NO," then offer an appropriate toy.

Digging

Some dogs are natural-born diggers. It's fun, and they're accomplishing something. Try to determine the reason for the digging.

- If Rover is digging up your garden – he may smell a chipmunk, and is trying to find it. If that's the case, he won't stop digging until you relocate the source of his interest.
- If he's digging because he's bored, try to supply him with appropriate activities while he's outside. Some toys in the yard or a raucous game of fetch can expend a lot of pent-up energy.
- If he's digging because he's looking for a cool spot, you may want to consider bringing him inside. It may be too warm for him. If he would prefer to spend time with you outside, consider filling a child's wading pool with a little water for a quick cool-down.
- If he's digging for the fun of it, why not create an area where he can dig till his heart's content. Dig out an appropriate sized area and fill in the "pit" with a mixture of the removed dirt and sand. Bury some treats in the pit and let Rover go to town!

Barking

Barking is the dog's natural choice for communication, and some breeds are more vocal than others. If your dog's barking is becoming problematic, it is first helpful to try to determine why the dog is barking in the first place. If he's barking at a neighbor's dog in your yard, as soon as the trespasser leaves, the barking should subside. Some dogs bark when they are frightened, bored, or being protective. To correct barking that you consider a problem, you could follow these suggestions:

- Don't banish your dog to the basement, garage, or backyard. He may be lonely and barking to get your attention. Include your dog in the family's activities at home.
- If your dog barks while you are gone, consider giving him something to do. For instance, have him play "Search and Rescue" while you are gone. You take one of the specially designed toys that you can put treats inside (you can find them in any pet store). Fill them with the appropriate treats, hide the toy in a spot so your dog will have to search for it, but will be able to find it. After he "rescues" it, he will enjoy trying to get the treats out, and then, eating them. By the time he's finished, he may be ready for a nap. Dogs can't bark while they are napping!
- Try teaching the dog to speak on command. By teaching him to speak on command, you can then teach him to stop on command.
- Fill an empty soda can with coins and tape over the opening. You'll have made a noisemaker that you can shake when the undesirable barking starts. Shake the can as soon as the barking starts. The rattling startles him, and ceases the barking. Praise him for being quiet.
- Don't reward negative behavior. If your dog is barking, don't try to calm or soothe him. By comforting him, you are positively reinforcing the behavior you are trying to correct. Reward positive behavior (such as quiet) with praise.
- If you find that these suggestions aren't helping to solve the problem, consult with your veterinarian or canine behaviorist. They can offer advice on more intensive methods.

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