



You Don't Have a BAD Dog (you have a NORMAL dog)

Face it, most NORMAL dog behaviours have some degree of unacceptability amongst humans. After all, they greet strangers by sniffing butts. Upon greeting a family member, they are compelled to lick the other's face. They know that the freshest, most cool water is in the toilet bowl. They insist on repeating behaviours that we humans REWARD with our attention-and the things that get the MOST attention are: Keep-away with the Rolex watch (Gucci shoes, computer disks and other personal valuables also work really well). The whole world is just "chew toys" to them, and they have no way of knowing which things were put on earth for little dogs, and which things are irreplaceable family heirlooms.

If you expect your dog to somehow develop behaviours which are acceptable to HUMANS, then you must teach the dog that performing these behaviours is where his advantage lies. An untrained dog is an opportunist. He will do things that reward him and avoid things that don't. Puppies can't reason and don't know that a behaviour is good or bad. All the dog can figure out is that certain behaviours are followed by pleasurable consequences and certain behaviours are followed by unpleasant consequences. It is YOUR job to make sure that none of the "bad" behaviours (ones unacceptable to YOU) get rewarded. For instance, if "counter surfing" or garbage raiding is successful in gaining the dog a yummy treat, he's going to try to repeat that behaviour as often as possible. If sitting politely on the floor gets ignored by you, but jumping up gets you all excited and allows the dog to be close enough to lick your face, he's going to choose jumping up over sitting politely every time, because that's what you've selectively rewarded. Maybe not intentionally, but that doesn't matter-he's learned it just the same.

Remember that for every obnoxious behaviour your dog can produce, you can think of an acceptable behaviour to replace it with. You just have to stop rewarding the unwanted behaviour and reward a more pleasing behaviour in its place. Reward sitting with petting. Ignore jumping up. Reward staying away from the dinner table with treats (away from the table). Ignore begging. Don't let the pup "pull" you into a game of "keep-away" with something he shouldn't have. Steel yourself, and ignore him. Go pick up one of HIS toys, and act like it is the most special toy in the world. Toss it in the air and talk to it. Catch it and chase it. When he drops grandma's false teeth, engage him in a fun game with his own toy (unless, of course, you want him to prefer grandma's false teeth, because of all the attention it gets him).

It's sad to report that behaviour problems are listed as the reason for the surrender of 80% of the dogs that are dumped at the pounds and shelters. Dogs are sent off to the shelter when the owners can't cope with normal dog behaviours, which they could have redirected with very little effort. Dogs are killed by the millions each year, guilty of committing various heinous crimes, which are within the range of normal dog behaviour. The owner states "jumps on children," "chases the cat," "chews the furniture," or "runs away" as the reason for discarding the family dog like last week's meatloaf.

The tragedy is that people think that puppies can raise themselves to be model citizens (by human standards). Fat chance. People don't want to put in the time to prevent unacceptable behaviours and foster good behaviours. They often wait until the bad behaviours have a nice reward history, and they are as hard to remove as rust stains on a white t-shirt. In 25 years as a dog behaviour counselor, I got thousands of questions about how to "stop" the dog from doing this or that obnoxious behaviour. I never once got a question from anyone asking me how to prevent themselves from teaching the dog the obnoxious

behaviours in the first place. It seems no one is into prevention, but everyone wants a cure, or a quick fix. What's worse, they never like the answer. They're expecting me to tell them something like, "Get a tazer gun, and when he jumps up, zap a few thousand volts of electricity into his cranium..." Everyone is focusing on punishing the dog to rid themselves of the behaviour. My answer is always simply to find the dog NOT exhibiting the behaviour, and reward the self control resulting in the absence of the behaviour.

So, now that you know all of this, and you want to keep your adorable dog in your family his whole life long, you have vowed that you will not be in the shelter 6 months from now, trying to rid yourself of an out-of-control adolescent dog, right? You're ready to WORK at creating a GOOD DOG, right? Ok. Here are some simple steps you can take. You can teach your dog these things starting at 7 weeks of age. You don't have to wait to get into an obedience training class to do them. It's a simple list of do's and don'ts. If you catch yourself doing any of the things in the "DONT" column, get that rolled up newspaper and swat yourself with it until you come to your senses.

Reward the Good + Ignore the Bad = Success
(a simple formula to produce a good dog)

DO

- reward sitting quietly (sit for attention)
- encourage play with dogs own toys
- reward the dog for being quiet ("good quiet")
- feed the dog when he sits politely
- reward the dog each time he comes to you
- exercise him to prevent boredom
- let him earn his treats as rewards
- reward him for waiting at doorways
- reward eye contact every time you get it
- reward loose-leash walking with forward motion

DONT

- DONT stroke the dog if he jumps up (turn away)
- DONT chase the dog to get back your belongings
- DONT yell at the dog for barking (attention = reward)
- DONT put the bowl down while he's jumping around
- DONT scold if he runs off, then comes back (never scold when he comes to you)
- DONT punish for habits developed due to boredom
- DONT give him anything he wants because he's cute
- DONT let him barge through (slam the door shut)
- DONT let him reward himself for bad behaviours
- DONT move at all if he pulls the leash tight

A reward can be a treat, a game, a toy, attention, petting, eye contact, or access to something the dog wants (like to go through a door, or to continue a walk). Even yelling can be a reward to a dog who never gets any kind of attention. Be careful what you reward

A punishment is withholding a reward. You never have to get more nasty than that. The most powerful punisher is to ignore the dog. This means no reaction at all, not even eye contact, which could be perceived by the dog as successfully getting your attention.

Off to School - Obedience Classes are for Every dog

In the old days, people only signed up for an obedience training course if they planned to pursue competition obedience. Nowadays, everyone signs up for training classes, and they are called "pet dog training" classes, or "manners" classes, because they teach more than just the things you need to learn to compete in obedience trials. They teach the basics of control, and mix in some learning theory, and help with problem behaviours. Training classes, no matter what they're called, are a MUST for every dog, just as going to school is a must for human children.

In your obedience class, you will go beyond what you've taught your dog at home, and working in a class will show your dog that he must obey you even when surrounded by distractions. If you are asked to harshly correct or punish your dog with leash jerks or other punitive measures, you do not have to do so. Maybe you should look for a different class that uses positive methods, which will make learning more fun for you and your dog.

Many people quit attending classes after having gained a modicum of control over their dog and teaching him a few basic cues. Perhaps an advanced course is not for everyone, but you might check to see if your club or training school offers other classes for your dog. Many places have trick training classes, agility, flyball, scent-work, or other fun things you can do with your dog. You don't have to have a desire to compete to enjoy these recreational activities. They're a lot of fun.

EMPLOYMENT -- Give Your Dog a Job!

The best thing you can do to keep your dog out of trouble and use up all of the energy he has in his body, is to give him a job. Most breeds were developed to perform certain tasks for their owners. Some hunt, some herd, some guard, some pull sleds, but they all need a tremendous amount of energy and enthusiasm for their jobs. Many people can't just go out and buy a flock of sheep or take up sled dog racing, to allow the dog to use his natural instincts and inbred qualities. Therefore, many people find themselves with "high energy" dogs with nothing to do with all of that energy and intelligence. These dogs were not meant to sit home all day in a crate, or to be tied out in the yard. They need mental and physical stimulation.

How would you like to be kept in a room with no television, no books, no toys, and nothing to do? I'll tell you what your dog will do-he'll go nuts! Don't you dare leave your dog in the back yard with nothing to do, and then complain when he digs holes in the yard and barks at the squirrels all day. Your dog needs regular exercise and play with YOU. It's your job, and your half of the commitment to provide a safe and acceptable outlet for his energy and intelligence. If you choose a high energy dog, like a Border Collie, and don't expect to spend at least 30 minutes each day engaged in hard running (like fetch, flyball, or sheep-herding), you are asking for behaviour problems. These dogs will invent their own games if you don't give them enough "work" to do, and these may include "redecorating the house," chasing everything that moves (kids, joggers, cars), or excavating the yard.

Dogs need to be doing SOMETHING. They weren't put on the earth to serve out a sentence of solitary confinement. The job you give your dog could be a very simple one. Teach your dog to fetch the paper. Teach him to play Frisbee. Let him carry the mail in from the mailbox. Take him jogging with you. Keep him busy with activities like flyball and agility, and you will not have the dog develop annoying habits to fill his empty, boring days.

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