

Top Six Problems Solved

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Get S.M.A.R.T dogs
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1. INAPPROPRIATE TOILETING

Toileting in the house is one of the most common reasons dogs are excluded from the family home or worse still, surrendered to shelters. For this reason, it is perhaps the most urgent issue to teach when you first bring a puppy home. Prevention is the most successful method of training so right from day one, you need to be proactive to develop good toileting habits in your dog and prevent bad ones.

What's a 'toilet' to a dog?

Dogs choose a toileting spot based on several factors:

Smell – if it smells like a toilet it is a toilet. This is why prevention especially on soft materials, is so important. It is virtually impossible for a dog's nose NOT to be able to smell urine in carpet no matter how well you have cleaned an area.

Surface – a puppy or dog arrives at your home with a surface preference. This may be concrete (if they are use to being kennelled) paper, soft cloths (in a pet shop pen) or grass (if your lucky!). It is difficult for a dog to learn they must not pee on the tiles in the family room but they may pee on the tiles on the back porch. The toileting surface should be different from any in the home.

If the dog has been brought up in a good, sanitary environment he should prefer to toilet away from food, water and bedding. However for a dog who was not raised in ideal conditions, this may not be the case.

As well as the above, the toilet is anywhere where the puppy has been 'rewarded' for peeing by relieving his bladder. Nature provides this 'reward', punishment will not eliminate it.

Dogs may also eliminate to scent mark their territory. This behaviour is most often but not exclusively seen in entire male dogs. Usually there is a small amount of urine and it is placed up against a surface such as a curtain, chair or bedding or over another dog's food bowl or bedding. This is not a housetraining issue and needs to be dealt with separately.

Toileting problems are seen more often in small dogs which may be because:

- A greater percentage of small dogs than large dogs are allowed in the home therefore a greater percentage have toileting problems.
- Small dog puppies are often kept indoors on soft bedding and soiling areas creating a surface preference for soft, absorbent materials as opposed to grass.
- Small dogs being lower to the ground are more likely to dislike cold wet grass.
- Small dog/puppy accidents are less easily detected so favourite toileting spots may go unnoticed for some time reinforcing the spot as a suitable area by smell and practice.

Setting up for success.

Whether training a young puppy or retraining an older dog, the method for developing good toileting habits are the same.

Step 1. The dog's free area must be restricted. Unless you are actively playing or supervising your dog or puppy it should be confined in a small area. This is so that you are better able to supervise your dog, prevent mistakes, time toilet stops and have the opportunity to reward desired behaviour – toileting outside.

Ideally, the area should be for short periods only, you will be taking the dog out at frequent intervals to toilet. The dog may be tied to your waist by a lead or contained in a crate. The crate should contain:

- A comfortable sleeping area
- Suitable chew toys



If your dog needs to be confined for longer periods of time (over 2 hours) the area must also include:

- A clean bowl of water
- A toileting area (ideally a piece of turf) if your chosen toileting area is your back yard lawn. Using a piece of turf in preference to paper as the toileting area cuts out 'the middle man' in your dogs education – making it easier from the start for your puppy to understand that grass is the preferred surface.

Step 2: - Take your dog or puppy out to the designated area of your garden after every play, sleep, meal or drink – on average every hour. Say your special word that will eventually tell your dog to eliminate such as 'hurry up' and wait . When your puppy squats praise and reward him with several food treats. Make a really big fuss – this is great stuff. Your puppy may wonder why you think a natural function is so amazing but pay him big time and he'll be happy to oblige you quickly and consistently.

Step 3: -Repeat! Your puppy will need a long 'reward history' before he makes the connection that toileting outside is a consistently good thing to do. Outside is now providing three rewards – an empty bladder, a food treat and a happy owner. At the same time, mistakes have been prevented and the carpet is not sending fumes of 'toilet here' every time puppy passes by.

Common mistakes:

You forgot to go out with your puppy to reward him thereby providing less confirmation to your puppy that 'toileting outside is good!'

You roused on your puppy when he was 'caught in the act' – so now puppy is reluctant to 'wee' in front of you at all. Confused by being punished for a necessary bodily function, puppy now refuses to wee in front of you, preferring to hide and pee – behind the couch or under the bed creating lots of scented toileting areas for the future. It's easy to see how easily a cycle of mistakes can lead to long term, entrenched toileting problem.



The only solution is prevention and reward for correct behaviour. If your dog eliminates in front of you it is a *good thing* – he's halfway there! Now all you have to do is teach him that peeing in the house leads to a *gentle* interruption of "oops outside quickly" while peeing outside leads to an empty bladder, food treats and a happy, praising owner. A dog who is happy to oblige when outside is a dog's whose toileting habits are under your control. You can now toilet your dog before bed, a trip, or a walk. You know when he has 'been' so you are safe to leave him alone for a while creating great peace of mind.

2. PULLING ON LEAD

Many puppy books will advise you to attach a lead to your puppy and allow him to drag it all around the garden. The puppy learns that the lead will follow wherever he goes. When you start to hold the end of the lead, your puppy learns to pull just a little harder and the lead will still follow wherever he goes. Alternately, when you first attach a lead to your puppy you are so keen to go for a walk that you are the first to pull to make your puppy move. Dogs have a natural 'opposition reflex' so if you pull one way your pup will pull the other. It is easy to see how quickly pulling becomes established.

Learning to accept restraint.

To turn this around, your dog must learn that once the lead is attached he is restricted to an area close to you. While six weeks of age is the best time to start, this lesson can be learned at any age. However as the older dog has had a lot of rewards for pulling, the process can be expected to take a lot longer.

Allow your dog a lead length of approximately two meters. This will enable you to remain on the footpath while your dog investigates a nearby tree or lamppost – after all scent is for your dog what vision is to us. You wouldn't enjoy a walk blindfolded and your dog won't enjoy a walk if he is completely prevented from sniffing. Do not be tempted to shorten, pull or wrap the lead



around your hand. Hold the end of the lead only and try not to be the first to pull. The deal is the dog can have two meters to explore around you but he must not pull. You are now a six-legged team learning to move together.

Start by attaching your dog on lead to a post and stand close by. If your dog struggles take no notice, if he relaxes instantly reward with praise or treats. Next, hold the lead yourself and start to move around the back garden. This should be an easy place to start as your dog has probably thoroughly investigated your back garden already and won't be too excited. If the lead tightens stop immediately and act like the post – don't move at all and don't shorten the lead - just wait. When the lead slackens, immediately reward with praise and move forward. Your dog should be learning that pressure on the collar means 'stop' while no pressure on the collar means 'go' – sadly this is the opposite of what most dogs learn.

If all goes well, repeat in the front garden and then on the footpath just outside your home. Take your time and be consistent even if you do not get to walk very far that day. Do NOT be tempted to move forward when there is any tightness in the lead as this will only teach your dog that if he is persistent pulling will pay.

Several other strategies can help your dog to understand that a lead should be a light connection and not a tool for tug of war.

He Who Was First Shall Now Be Last

Whenever your dog charges ahead of you say 'steady' and change direction. Repeat until your dog realizes that you're the one dictating the direction of the walk. Adding the word 'steady' before each turn will teach your dog there is no point in charging ahead as you are about to change direction. Eventually 'steady' can be used as a general cue to 'slow down'.

Teach a Sweet Spot

Create a 'sweet spot' at your left leg where good things happen. The name for this sweet spot is 'close' or 'heel'. Whenever your dog is near this 'sweet spot' say 'Yes!' and dispense a treat as though from your left knee. If your dog moves too far ahead, stop, call him back and again reward from your left knee. You want the dog to know there are good things at your end of the lead not just out in front where the good smells are.

Let's Stay Calm

How you prepare for your walk can contribute to, or reduce, the level of arousal even before you step out the door. Move slowly and speak quietly. Sit somewhere away from the exit door and wait for your dog to come to you and sit before putting his lead on. If he gets up before his lead is attached, stop, look away and wait again. Wait for a sit at the exit door. Sit once more as soon as you reach the footpath. Wait until the leash is loose and your dog is looking at you to see what is going to happen next – praise and start walking remembering to use one of the strategies outlined above if the lead should start to tighten.

Be proactive - whenever tension creeps into the lead do something about it immediately. Apply short vibrations to the lead to 'keep it alive', change direction, or call the dog back to you but never allow the lead to become a 'tug-of-war' rope between you.

3. TRAINING A RELIABLE 'COME'

'Come' is probably the single most important behaviour your dog will ever learn so it is worth taking the time to train thoroughly each of the several components which make up this exercise.

Step 1: Attention! – or your name means "look at me"

Make sure your dog understands that whenever he hears his name he should look at you. Start by saying your dog's name whenever he does look at you - this "labels" the behaviour of looking at you with your dog's name. The next step is to call your dog's name and see if he turns to look at you – if he does immediately reward with praise, a treat or a game. It is important that there is a positive consequence when he hears his name. You don't want your dog to 'come' on his name but rather to give you attention because a command or 'cue' will follow. For example you may say "Rover Stay" rather than "Come". Your dog's name should only mean "tune in – I'm about to ask you something" and not any specific behaviour in itself.



Step 2: "Come" is a position close to you.

Teach your dog that 'come' is the human name for a position close to you with your hand on his collar (so you may attach the lead). Hold your dog close and in a pleasant but firm manner say "Come" just as you would in the park and follow immediately with a treat. Repeat frequently at different times and in different locations. Never give your dog a treat unless you are holding his collar. This is a safety issue which prevents creating a dog who comes close to you, perhaps grabs a treat but stays just outside the "gotch-ya" zone.

Step 3: "Come" on lead

While walking on lead, surprise your dog by suddenly saying his name followed by the word "Come" and move quickly away from him. Encourage your dog to into his 'come' position, take his collar and reward him. This is a foolproof practice run for your dog as being on lead will prevent your dog from choosing to ignore you.

Step 4: Reinforcing "Come!" as the right choice

Your dog will only chose to move into "Come" position if it ALWAYS is a happy place to be. Reward your dog every time he 'checks in' with you with praise and/or treats and games. The best thing your dog can do is to choose to spend time with you. Every time your dog moves back to see you when off lead – acknowledge and reward his attention. If you need to do something your dog perceives as unpleasant such as putting him outside, going to the vets or having a bath – do not call him to you. Simply go to him and put a lead on with as little emotion as possible.

NEVER EVER PUNISH your dog for coming to you or for allowing you to catch him. In either case from your dog's point of view he is being punished for being caught. Next time he'll be faster and craftier. If you have to 'collect' your dog you may not feel like rewarding him but try to stay as neutral as possible and simply put the lead on and get over it – punishment might make you feel better but it will only set your dog's recall training back immeasurably.

Step 5: Semi-freedom – "Come" on a long line

Prevent bad habits from developing by attaching a long drag line of approximately 5 meters to your dog when you first take him out to off leash area. PVC rope is ideal as it is light, easy on the hands, waterproof and difficult to tangle. Initially, hold the end of the line and regularly repeat the exercise in Step 3 above. Later you can drop the line to allow your dog even more freedom but you will still be able to regain control quickly by standing on the end of the line if necessary.

Your dog will have a lot more space and freedom but you have ensured coming is still not optional. You may choose to use a light line for many months before you feel confident enough to grant your dog complete freedom.

Step 6: You're the best game in town!

Although it is natural for a dog to engage in some amount of independent exploring and socializing, the best game in town should always be time with you. Interactive games are a great way to enhance your relationship with your dog and to help him burn off excess energy in a controlled way.

4. SETTLE

One of the most important exercises to teach your puppy or older dog is the 'settle' exercise. This should be taught as soon as your dog arrives home and will enhance later exercises such as walking on lead, and 'stay'.



Settle while handling.

Accepting handling and restraint is a vital lesson which should be a major focus of puppy classes. Right from the day your puppy arrives home, he must learn that it is safe and generally pleasant for you to hold and restrain him for short periods of time. Struggling to get out of your arms should never be rewarded, instead put your puppy down only when he is *not* struggling.

If you own an older dog this exercise is still important although it may be easier to practice restraint on the ground holding the dog by the collar or around the chest and rear end. Again, make the experience as pleasant as possible but try not to reward struggling with a complete release. Pay particular attention to sensitive areas such as ears, mouth, paws, rear end and around the collar. In cases of emergency or even just to clip your dog on lead, you are likely to reach out and grab the collar. This is actually a very threatening gesture in dog language so you need to desensitize your dog to this action by taking the collar and giving a treat. Gradually reach out and grab with a little more force. Repeat and treat hundreds of times with kids and adults. You are actually 'classically conditioning' your dog enjoy being grabbed and held.

Settle and Play

It is fun to play with your dog but for some dogs play quickly gets out of hand. If you invite your dog to 'play' you must also have an 'off' switch that tells him to stop playing or 'settle' – otherwise you do not have effective control of the dog. One of the best ways to train your dog is to mix up active and passive activities such as chasing a ball with a settle behaviour such as 'sit' or 'drop'. This should develop a lifetime habit of using 'play' as a reward for 'settle' and gives you excellent control of your dog and the games you play together.

3. Settle on lead.

This 'Settle' exercise is most easily taught by having your dog on a medium length lead, attached to a chair. Make yourself a cup of coffee, read a magazine or watch TV for the next twenty minutes or so, sit in the chair and completely ignore your dog.

Eventually, your dog will lie down. Immediately reward him with a small treat on the floor between the paws - *not* from your hand. Keep rewarding at regular intervals as long as your dog remains in the 'down' position. The harder this exercise is for your dog the more rewards you will need. If your dog gets up, say nothing but immediately stop rewarding – including all eye contact, smiles, pats or even attempts to get him to lie down again – this is not a 'down stay' exercise it is simply a 'settle' exercise. Just wait it out. When your dog does lie down immediately begin to deliver treats on the floor again.

After fifteen minutes or when the dog has demonstrated consistent settled behaviour, release him with your chosen 'release' word such as 'free' or 'go' and move your dog out of position. Release with a minimum amount of fuss. You definitely do not want the release to be more exciting and rewarding than the 'settle' behaviour.

This settle exercise will:

- Help to teach your dog to accept restraint both on lead and off.
- Teach your dog that there are rewards for quiet passive behaviour
- Help your dog to develop 'self control'- the sooner it settles the sooner it is rewarded
- Put you in control of your dog in a positive way enhancing your role as leader.

5. STAY

What does 'stay' mean to you? Does it mean freeze, don't move a muscle? Does it mean the dog can look around but must not move his feet? Is it ok for the dog to move from a sit to a down as long as he doesn't follow you? Perhaps it means 'wait' momentarily while I pass ahead of you through a doorway? Or does it simply mean you have to 'stay' in the yard? Before you can train your dog to do any behaviour you need to have an *exact* picture of what your command or cue is going to mean for you and your dog.



Do you need a 'stay' command?

Many trainers see a 'stay' command as unnecessary. If your dog understands 'sit' means stay sitting until released with another command or release word – 'stay' is an irrelevant extra word, after all your dog cannot 'sit' and move at the same time. However many dogs are not taught that every behaviour has a start *and a finish*. People are good at remembering to cue the start of the behaviour with a word such as 'sit' but they often forget to tell the dog when he can 'unsit'.

The Release Word

The 'release word', cue or signal lets the dog know that the behaviour you have asked for is over. If your dog never learns that a release is coming, he's going to get up when he reckons he's been there long enough! If you are unreliable and forget to release your dog, your dog will also be unreliable. This is why it is important to start with very short 'stays' – so that the dog learns an end or release is coming. Once your dog understands this principle, he will wait for any length of time, assured that you have not forgotten about him and that indeed release is coming. Common release words are 'free', 'off you go', 'playtime' and "o.k."

Stay - by my side.

Once your dog understands that 'sit' 'stand' and 'down' have a beginning and an end, you can start to increase the length of time the dog holds those positions by your side. At this point, although the dog is effectively doing a 'stay' by your side you probably don't need to add the 'stay' cue. Rather, we want to make sure the dog holds the 'sit' position until given the release cue. Slowly build duration until the dog is able to hold at least one of the positions for up to one minute by your side. Until your dog has understood the concept of holding sit or down by your side for up to one minute until released you should not move onto the second step – adding distance and perhaps the cue 'stay'.

'Stay'.

Although unnecessary from the dog's point of view most people like to teach 'stay' as a cue that informs the dog that you are now moving away and he is to stay *until you return to him*. Do not be tempted to call your dog out of a stay. This will only create a dog who anxiously watches you in anticipation of a 'come' or release signal. Your dog will be more reliable in his 'stay' if he knows that you will always return to him before he is released.

Place an open hand in front of the dog's face, say 'stay' and move just a step away. You may move sideways or forward and turn to face your dog. You are actually adding two new criteria - movement and distance while continuing to increase duration – or time away from your dog. These are a lot of variations so proceed slowly and reward regularly. Praising your dog gently while he holds his 'stay' position will provide lots of positive feedback to your dog that he is doing the right thing and is better than repeating the 'stay' command unnecessarily. You may follow praise with moving in and placing a small treat between your dog's paws as you did in the 'settle' exercise or from your hand in the case of a 'sit stay'. Be certain that the best rewards – praise and food – are given during the stay and *not after* you release your dog.

'Wait'

If you feel you need a temporary pause when you will not be returning to your dog consider using a different cue such as 'wait'. This cue suggests that the dog remain attentive because in a moment he'll be asked to do something such as 'come', 'fetch' or 'send out'. Many people also use a different hand signal for 'wait'. Think carefully about what you want each of these terms to mean before you start to train your dog.

Taking it on the road

Stability exercises such as 'stay' need to be trained regularly, in different places under different circumstances if they are to become truly reliable. Having a dog who will hold a stay anywhere anytime until released is a very advanced skill. Teaching 'stay' in the kitchen is a great distraction free place to start but is unlikely to achieve a 'stay' in the park. Your dog's natural temperament – nervous or confident, active or lazy, clingy or independent – will also make a big difference to his ability to maintain a stay position so be patient and practice, practice, practice!



6. SIT TO GREET - or an end to jumping.

Coming home to a happy hound rather than an empty house is one of the real pleasures of dog ownership. It is natural for dogs, particularly young dogs to welcome returning members of the pack with a lot of submissive posturing and face licking. Problems start when our dogs - too low to reach our faces – start to jump up. Soon this simple greeting ritual turns into a time of stress and exasperation for owners or their visitors who don't enjoy being jumped on by a twenty kilo muddied mutt. What to do?

Train don't complain.

The basic principle to remember is that the dog is seeking the reward of your attention by jumping up to greet you. Most training will therefore be based on removing your attention for jumping and giving your attention for 'sitting'. Here are a few hints:

Plan the exact greeting behaviour you expect from your dog both when you arrive home and when visitors arrive. Are you happy if your dog simply keeps all four feet on the ground or would you prefer a sit? May the dog greet you at the door or in the kitchen? Is he to wait for a release word or is he free to move around as long as he's not jumping? Once you have decided on the exact behaviour you want you can start to train it, rewarding your dog for little steps in the right direction. Be specific, be consistent and be patient.

Teach your dog to 'sit' – in all situations, including the high excitement of homecomings.

Set up front door rehearsals. Don't wait until you are actually having dinner guests to start training the dog not to jump – set up rehearsals on weekends or whenever you have time. Ask other family members to ring the doorbell and practice lots of front door greetings. Keep a jar of treats handy at the front door and reward your dog for either keeping 'four paws on the floor' or for sit. If your dog is very lively you may start by simply throwing small treats on the floor whenever your dog keeps 'four on the floor'. Treats stop immediately if he should start to jump. Throwing treats on the floor keeps the dog's attention focused low down rather than up at faces. If you prefer to reward a sit, treat from the hand. After several repetitions your dog will start to act more calmly at the front door in the hope of a reward.

Teach 'up' and 'off'. Some people like their dogs to jump up on them some of the time. In this case you need to put the jump up behaviour 'on cue'. When the dog jumps up say "up good boy" then immediately follow with "off – good boy" and some food rewards. In most cases there should be bigger rewards for the "off" than the "up". This is another example of using a cue to turn 'on' and 'off' a specific behaviour. Just as the dog learns 'sit' and 'unsit' the dog can learn 'up' and 'off'. The dog should never be rewarded for 'up' however unless you have first asked for it!

Learn to 'talk dog'

As mentioned above, most jumping up is part of a greeting ritual that means our dogs are happy to see us so we don't want to be horrible to them, we just want them to stop. We can use our body language to help our dogs to understand that jumping up is not desirable.

Stillness begets stillness – the quieter you move and speak the quieter your dog will become. Moving around quickly, pushing your dog away or yelling at your dog is only likely to increase his arousal and excitement.

Stand your ground or lean into your dog's space. As your dog gets older it is rude for him to push into your personal space. Stand your ground or even lean into his space instead. There is no need to step on toes or knee your dog in the chest but refuse to concede ground to his pushy behaviour. When he sits be sure to follow with praise and rewards.

Turn your back – taking away your attention by turning your back works well with some dogs although highly excitable dogs may simply continue to jump on your back because the movement of turning still speaks 'activity' in doggy language.

Ignore your dog going about your tasks until he settles or at least keeps 'four on the floor'.



Crouch down – to your dog's level and say hello to your hearts content. This often works well for small dogs or very young puppies. This method simply teaches the dog that jumping is not necessary to get what it wants.

Note: The suggestions above are for a typical, untrained but friendly and sociable young dog who jumps up and demand your affection. If jumping up is always directly aligned in front of you, and is accompanied by a hard stare in the eye with any signs of aggression such as hard nipping, or growling you need to consult a behaviour specialist for a full assessment.

Still having problems? Check for:

Consistency

How consistently are you ignoring jumping up and rewarding sit? Does it depend on the clothes you are wearing, the mood you're in or how busy you are? Perhaps you are consistent but children, visitors or strangers in the street think your dog is so cute, they don't mind him jumping up. If your dog is randomly rewarded for jumping up it will not only take him longer to learn the correct behaviour it will actually teach him to try harder and be more persistent. This is one reason why the smaller and cuter your dog is the harder this exercise may be to teach. Few people will tolerate a fully grown Labrador jumping up but many do not object to a Chihuahua .

Inadvertent Rewards

Are you rewarding jumping up with negative attention such as pushing or yelling. Some dog find even negative attention better than none.

Your body language – is your body telling your dog to be still and quiet?

Your training levels – have you trained a reliable 'sit'in a distraction free area before relying on it in a high excitement situation such as meeting and greeting

The number of rewards – are you generously rewarding correct behaviour at every opportunity. Every reward is a piece of information telling your dog how you would like him to behave in a given situation.

