

Dog: Nuisance Behaviors



What Are Nuisance Behaviors

Nuisance behaviors are the things dogs do that drive us crazy:

- Raiding the garbage can
- Stealing things and running off
- Jumping up on people
- Charging through the door
- Counter surfing for kitchen scraps

These and many other dog foibles can make you wonder what on earth you have done to deserve such inconsiderate and naughty behavior.

It Isn't Personal

If this is your dog, rest assured he isn't trying to get back at you for coming home late from work, nor is he plotting to become master of the household through domination.

Your dog is simply being a dog. To him, nothing is more natural than pulling on leash or knocking over the trash can—after all, that's where food smells are coming from. This is important to know, because the key to curbing nuisance behaviors is understanding your dog's motivation for whichever behavior has you tearing your hair out. For example:

Behavior

- Raiding the garbage can
- Stealing things and running off
- Jumping up on people
- Charging through the door

Motivation

- Opportunism, boredom
- Wanting to play—getting attention
- Greeting, expressing joy
- Getting outside now, now, now

What Motivates Your Dog?

Think about your dog's breed (mix), age, energy level, and personality. If he had a job what would it involve? Lots of people, other dogs, the couch, playing with toys, solving puzzles, searching for things?

Dealing with Nuisance Behaviors

Once you have figured out your dog's motivation, what can you do?

First, have realistic expectations. Leaving dogs alone for a full workday is a lot to ask. How long a dog can be left alone depends on age, breed, and temperament, but 4–6 hours is feasible for most adult dogs. (Puppies that aren't house-trained should be taken out every 2–4 hours.) If you are gone for longer, arrange for a dog walker or enroll your dog in a doggie daycare.

Second, increase physical and mental exercise. The majority of dogs were bred with a working purpose in mind, and giving dogs vigorous daily exercise has profound effects on their behavior. Tired dogs chew less, bark less, sleep more, and are more likely to relax when home alone.

If your dog rearranges your home while you are gone, you can safely assume he lacks mental stimulation. Just as people turn to crossword puzzles, books, chess games, and other brain-

Dog: Nuisance Behaviors *(continued)*

vitalizing activities for the fun of mental gymnastics, dogs need to solve doggie problems. Provide your dog with interactive puzzle toys, search games, and training challenges.

Third, use food-dispensing toys. Dogs are meant to work for their food; in the wild, nobody just handed them a bowl of kibble. Serving all your dog's meals in a stuffed KONG® or treat ball, in a food-dispensing device, or through a game such as hide-and-seek can relieve many nuisance behaviors.

Fourth, use management techniques. If your dog pulls on leash, walk him on a humane anti-pull collar such as the Gentle Leader or front buckle harness. If he jumps up on you when you get home, restrict his access to your front door with a baby gate. If he counter surfs or gets into the trash, restrict his access to the kitchen.

Fifth, train an alternative behavior. Training solutions require a little more effort, but the results are worth it. With a bit of patience and consistency, you can teach a puller to walk nicely on a loose leash, a door jumper to sit for greetings, a barker to go quiet on command, and so forth.

Help with Your Problem

We have handouts covering all common nuisance behaviors:

- Attention-Seeking Behaviors
- Loose-Leash Walking
- Begging
- Chewing
- Counter Surfing
- Leave It
- Poop Eating (Coprophagia)
- Repetitive Behavior
- Barking
- Jumping
- Play Biting