



CANINE BEHAVIOR CONCERNS

AGGRESSION (TOWARDS HUMANS)

Aggressive behavior in any dog is a serious issue and should be handled as soon as possible by a professional animal behaviorist or trainer. If a seemingly uncontrollable, aggressive dog injures a person, then dogs are usually ordered to be euthanized. This need not be the case. Most aggression is caused by fear and there are many things you will need to consider. Most dogs that suffer from aggression are sweet, affectionate, caring dogs, at least most of the time. They are very rarely the snarling, snapping, frothing monsters that most people picture when they hear “aggressive”. However, any form of aggression is a serious concern and must be addressed. Aggressive conditions will, almost without fail, become worse if not treated quickly. Curing the problem at an early stage is best for the dog as well as your family. Early warning signs of aggression such as barking at strangers should be addressed promptly.

Generally, the only real option is to work out the problem within the household. Placing the dog in another home or shelter doesn't correct the problem – it just relocates it. There are several different routes that may be taken to correct and/or control a dog's aggression.



Here are some helpful tips / suggestions to consider:

- **Get a medical checkup.** Take the dog to the vet to rule out any health problems. A painful injury or physical ailment can cause the sweetest animal to become ill-tempered. Since animals cannot tell us directly that they are hurting, their misbehaving may be their only way to communicate their pain to us.
- **Ask a veterinarian for help.** Some vets have experience with behavioral issues, so you may want to check with your vet first to see if he/she may be able to offer some assistance in that area. Your vet could also consult with a board-certified veterinary behaviorist through Tufts University or one of the other university animal behavior clinics.
- **Consult an animal behaviorist.** An animal behaviorist attempts to understand the reason for the behavior, considering the animal's history, temperament, environment, experience, etc. After making a diagnosis, a behaviorist would help you understand how animals learn and how you can work specifically on the aggression problem to control and/or correct it. We would be more than happy to help you with a referral for services.
- **Consult a trainer.** A trainer works differently than an animal behaviorist. In most cases, a behaviorist is more appropriate for helping with an aggression problem. But, if an animal behaviorist is not available locally, and you want to work with someone, you should check out the programs of local trainers. Trainers vary in their experience, services, and training techniques. Greenville County Animal Care has long term relationships with training partners in our community that offer many affordable training options such as classes and private lessons. We would be happy to help get you connected with the right trainer for your needs.
- **Read a book on the subject.** We recommend the following books:
 - *Final Hope* by Stephen Joubert. This book has a helpful section on finding a professional to work with.
 - *The Dog Who Loved Too Much* by Dr. Nicholas Dodman. This book outlines many of the drug therapies that are available to treat aggressive behavior.
- **When working on the behavior is not an option.** Unfortunately, when working on the behavior is not an option, or it has been tried without success, there are not many alternatives. Finding

another home is rarely a choice (usually only when there is a friend or family member who is willing to take the dog). Most rescue groups are not able to manage aggressive dogs or to place them. These dogs pose a threat to visitors, volunteers, and employees, and create a huge liability risk for any organization.

Is the Dog Aggressive?

When trying to determine if your dog is truly aggressive so that we can guide you in getting the proper assistance, consider your answers to the following questions:

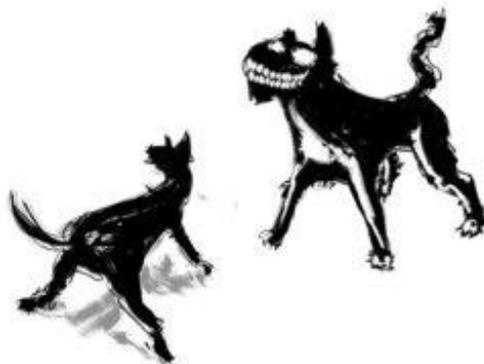
- What would happen if I walked into your yard with the dog there? Or into your house?
- Does your dog's face look relaxed or tense?
- What would happen if you brought your dog into my dog's yard?
- What would happen if you put your dog into a pen with other dogs?
- How is your dog with treats and food when people or other animals are around?
- What does your dog do when children come around?
- Would you let a child hug your dog?
- What would your dog do if a small child hit him or pulled his tail?
- What would the dog do if a stranger came up and petted him?
- Is the dog immediately engaging?

Note: a wagging tail does not necessarily mean a friendly dog. Look in the dog's eyes: Does he appear to be happy and relaxed, or frightened, or shifty? Because dogs wag their tails in anticipation, even fighting dogs will wag their tails before a fight.

AGGRESSION (TOWARDS OTHER DOGS)

Dogs may show aggression toward other dogs for a variety of reasons. Depending on the specific problem, it is possible that working with a behaviorist could improve or correct the behavior. Placement with an animal rescue group or no-kill shelter is not likely to be a solution. Many rescue groups house their dogs together, or at least depend on them sharing space at times. Many others take their dogs to adoption fairs or events to find them homes, which means many dogs in close quarters. The best solution is usually for owners to work on the behavior themselves, and/or to seek a new home themselves. If you would like to try to work on the aggression, here are some suggestions:

- **Ask a veterinarian for help.** Some vets have experience with behavioral issues, so you may want to check with your vet first to see if he/she may be able to offer some assistance in that area. Your vet could also consult with a board-certified veterinary behaviorist through Tufts University or one of the other university animal behavior clinics.
- **Consult an animal behaviorist.** An animal behaviorist attempts to understand the reason for the behavior, considering the animal's history, temperament, environment, experience, etc. After making a diagnosis, a behaviorist would help you



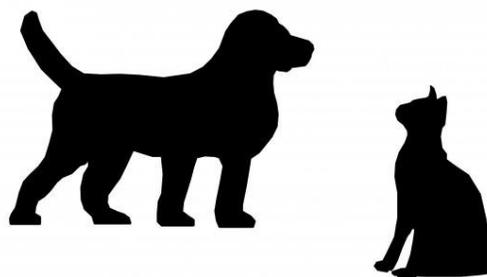
understand how animals learn and how you can work specifically on the aggression problem to control and/or correct it. We would be more than happy to help you with a referral for services.

- **Consult a trainer.** A trainer works differently than an animal behaviorist. In most cases, a behaviorist is more appropriate for helping with an aggression problem. But, if an animal behaviorist is not available locally, and you want to work with someone, you should check out the programs of local trainers. Trainers vary in their experience, services, and training techniques. Greenville County Animal Care has long term relationships with training partners in our community that offer many affordable training options such as classes and private lessons. We would be happy to help get you connected with the right trainer for your needs.
- **Change the dog's living situation.** Though juggling dogs around to prevent fighting can seem daunting and is simply unmanageable in some households, it's worth looking into, considering the alternatives. The yard could be separated by additional fencing, or a dog run could be added. Kiddie gates and extra doors (screen doors can be a good option) can separate the household so that the dogs can have their own territory.
- **Find an only-dog home.** The new owner must be made aware of the problem, however, since most people enjoy exercising their pet in areas where there are other animals or they may have animals that visit their house. If you decide to look for a new home, please read through the section of our resources for Finding a New Home.
- **Do some reading.** These books can be helpful:
 - *Final Hope* by Stephen Joubert. This book has a great section on finding a behaviorist to work with.
 - *The Dog Who Loved Too Much* by Dr. Nicholas Dodman. This book addresses many problematic dog behaviors.

AGGRESSION (TOWARD OTHER ANIMALS – CATS, BIRDS, RABBITS, ETC)

Family Members, Strangers or Other Animals

Determining whom your dog is aggressive toward is essential to understanding their behavior. It's common for dogs to behave aggressively toward unfamiliar people. Some studies report that as many as 60 to 70% of all pet dogs bark threateningly at strangers and act unfriendly when around them. Aggression toward unfamiliar dogs is also widespread. It's less common for dogs to direct aggression toward family members or other pets in the home. Most problematic are dogs who are aggressive toward children, especially children in the family. Not only is aggression toward children exceedingly difficult to treat because of safety concerns, the likelihood that a dog with this problem will ever become trustworthy is slim.



Some dogs are aggressive only to a certain category of people. A dog might be aggressive only with the veterinarian or groomer, or with the postal carrier, or with people in wheelchairs or individuals using canes and walkers. In some cases, it's easy to limit a dog's access to the people that upset them. For instance, if your short-haired dog dislikes the groomer, you can just groom them yourself at home. But in other cases, the targeted people are impossible to avoid. For example, if you have a dog who dislikes children and you live in a densely populated urban apartment building next to a preschool, it will be difficult to avoid exposing your dog to children.

Aggression toward people, aggression toward dogs and aggression toward other animals are relatively independent patterns of behavior. If your dog is aggressive toward other dogs, for example, that doesn't mean they're any more or less likely to be aggressive toward people.

Risk Factors

If you're deciding whether to live with and treat your aggressive dog, there are several factors to consider because you, as the pet parent, are ultimately responsible for your dog's behavior. These factors involve the level of risk in living with your dog and the likelihood of changing their behavior:

- **Size.** Regardless of other factors, large dogs are more frightening and can inflict more damage than small dogs.
- **Age.** Young dogs with an aggression problem are believed to be more malleable and easier to treat than older dogs.
- **Bite history.** Dogs who have already bitten are a known risk and an insurance liability.
- **Severity.** Dogs who stop their aggression at showing teeth, growling or snapping are significantly safer to live and work with than dogs who bite. Likewise, dogs who have delivered minor bruises, scratches and small punctures are less risky than dogs who have inflicted serious wounds.
- **Predictability.** Dogs at the highest risk of being euthanized for aggression are those who give little or no warning before they bite and who are inconsistently, unpredictably aggressive. Dogs who give warning before they bite allow people and other animals time to retreat and avoid getting hurt. As counterintuitive as it might seem, it's easier to live with a dog who always reacts aggressively when, for instance, every time you push him off the bed than a dog who does so only sporadically.
- **Targets.** How often your dog is exposed to the targets of their aggression can affect how easy it is to manage and resolve their behavior. A dog who's aggressive to strangers is relatively easy to control if you live in a rural environment with a securely fenced yard. A dog who's aggressive to children can be managed if pet parents are childless and have no friends or relatives with children. A dog who is aggressive to unfamiliar dogs poses little difficulty for pet parents who dislike dog parks and prefer to exercise their dog on isolated hiking trails. In contrast, living with a dog who has recurring ear infections and bites family members when they try to medicate her can be stressful and unpleasant.
- **Triggers.** Are the circumstances that prompt your dog to behave aggressively easy or impossible to avoid? If your dog only guards food while they're eating, the solution is straightforward: Keep away from them while they're eating. If no one can safely enter the kitchen when your dog's there because they guard their empty food bowl in the cupboard, that's another story. If your dog bites any stranger within reach, they are a lot more dangerous than a dog who bites strangers only if they try to kiss them.
- **Ease of motivating your dog.** The final consideration is how easy it is to motivate your dog during retraining. The safest and most effective way to treat an aggression problem is to implement behavior modification under the guidance of a qualified professional. Modifying a dog's behavior involves rewarding them for good behavior—so you'll likely be more successful if your dog enjoys praise, treats and toys. Dogs who aren't particularly motivated by the usual rewards can be especially challenging to work with, and the likelihood of such a dog getting better is small.

Always Work with Your Veterinarian

Some aggressive dogs behave the way they do because of a medical condition or complication. In addition to acute painful conditions, dogs with orthopedic problems, thyroid abnormality, adrenal dysfunction, cognitive dysfunction, seizure disorders and sensory deficits can exhibit changes in irritability and aggression. Geriatric dogs can suffer confusion and insecurity, which may prompt aggressive behavior. Certain medications can alter mood and affect your dog's susceptibility to aggression. Even diet has been implicated as a potential contributing factor. If your dog has an aggression problem, it's crucial to take them to a veterinarian, before you do anything else, to rule out medical issues that could cause or worsen her behavior. If the veterinarian discovers a medical problem, you'll need to work closely with her to give your dog the best chance at improving.

Work with a Professional Behavior Expert

Aggression can be a dangerous behavior problem. It's complex to diagnose and can be tricky to treat. Many behavior modification techniques have detrimental effects if misapplied. Even highly experienced professionals get bitten from time to time, so living with and treating an aggressive dog is inherently risky. A qualified professional can develop a treatment plan customized to your dog's temperament and your family's unique situation, and they can coach you through its implementation. They can monitor your dog's progress and make modifications to the plan as

required. If appropriate, they can also help you decide when your dog's quality of life is too poor or the risks of living with your dog are too high and euthanasia is warranted. If you choose to employ a Certified Professional Dog Trainer (CPDT), be sure that the trainer is qualified to help you. Determine whether they have education and experience in treating canine aggression, as this expertise isn't required for CPDT certification. We would be happy to help connect you with one of our training partners or to reach out to someone who can help.

Can Aggression Be Cured?

Pet parents of aggressive dogs often ask whether they can ever be sure that their dog is "cured." Taking into account the behavior modification techniques that affect aggression, our current understanding is that the incidence and frequency of some types of aggression can be reduced and sometimes eliminated. However, there's no guarantee that an aggressive dog can be completely cured. In many cases, the only solution is to manage the problem by limiting a dog's exposure to the situations, people or things that trigger their aggression. There's always risk when dealing with an aggressive dog. Pet parents are responsible for their dogs' behavior and must take precautions to ensure that no one's harmed. Even if a dog has been well behaved for years, it's not possible to predict when all the necessary circumstances might come together to create "the perfect storm" that triggers their aggression. Dogs who have a history of resorting to aggression as a way of dealing with stressful situations can fall back on that strategy. Pet parents of aggressive dogs should be prudent and always assume that their dog is NOT cured so that they never let down their guard.

BITING

Over one million dog bites are reported annually, so it's a common problem. Sadly, there are very few options for dogs who have bitten someone. The owner/caretaker often will not see the dog as "aggressive." But, even a dog who is usually extremely sweet, obedient and healthy may bite. Dogs with aggression problems generally get worse if the problem is not addressed. It is important that some course of action needs to be taken.

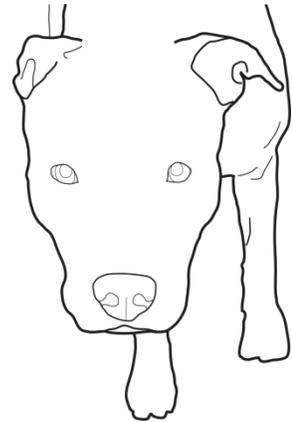
- A dog who has bitten can rarely be placed in a new home (generally only if someone you know takes the dog), and most shelters and sanctuaries are unable to manage dogs with a history of aggression. Even if the dog is generally very sweet, he/she will always have to be handled with the utmost care because of the dog's history – liability and responsibility require this. Additionally, the quality of life for the dog in a shelter or sanctuary could be quite poor, since handling would be limited. Generally, the only alternative to euthanasia is for the owner to keep the animal and work on the problem.
- You will need to work with an experienced animal behaviorist or trainer to improve the dog's behavior.
- Read up on the subject. These books can be helpful:
 - *Final Hope* by Stephen Joubert. This book has a great section about finding a behaviorist to work with.
 - *The Dog Who Loved Too Much* by Dr. Nicholas Dodman. This book outlines many of the drug therapies that are available to treat aggressive behavior.
- Find ways to manage the dog more carefully.
 - The dog will need to be properly controlled and kept from high-risk situations. This may include kenneling when guests come, building a new fence or separate pen, using a muzzle on walks, etc.
- Once a dog has bitten someone, keeping them involves some increased risk of liability. If the dog bites again, repercussions will be more serious than for a first bite. If keeping the dog is not an option, euthanasia may be the only remaining alternative. Some vets will even come to the home. At least in this way, the dog will be with loved ones when he is euthanized. But consider your options at the time – work with your veterinarian and a trainer to see if the issue is manageable/treatable.



BULLY BREED SPECIFIC

Pit Bulls

Pit bulls, and even pit mixes, can be very difficult to place. We have several pit bulls and pit mixes who live at the shelter. Most of them are wonderful, friendly, intelligent, attractive dogs, but because they are so difficult to place, we will have many of them for longer periods of time. If you need to find a home for your dog, the best bet is for you to try to place the dog directly into a home by doing some advertising. We have lots of information on Finding a New Home for an animal, but please be aware that screening is particularly important when placing pit bulls because, sadly, some people are attracted to them for the wrong reasons. You are the best advocate for your pet and can ensure that they end up in a safe and loving home.



Are Some Breeds More Aggressive Than Others?

It's true that some breeds might be more likely to bite if we look at statistics gathered on biting and aggression. There are many reasons for this. One likely reason is that most dog breeds once served specific functions for humans. Some were highly prized for their guarding and protective tendencies, others for their hunting prowess, others for their fighting skills, and others for their "gameness" and tenacity. Even though pet dogs of these breeds rarely fulfill their original purposes these days, individuals still carry their ancestors' DNA in their genes, which means that members of a particular breed might be predisposed to certain types of aggression. Despite this, it's neither accurate nor wise to judge a dog by their breed. Far better predictors of aggressive behavior problems are a dog's individual temperament and history of interacting with people and other animals. You should always research breeds to be sure that the breed or breed mix you're interested in is a good fit for you and your lifestyle. However, the best insurance policies against aggression problems are to select the best individual dog for you no matter the age and size. If you adopt a younger dog, be sure to provide them with appropriate socialization as a youngster.

INAPPROPRIATE URINATION/DEFECATION



How long is the dog alone in the house?

There are physical limitations beyond which the animal cannot be expected to control themselves.

How old is the dog?

Some problems can be age-related. An older dog may need to go more often than he did in his youth. Older female dogs may have urine leakage problems because of the loss of estrogen. There are drugs that can help with age-related urine-leakage problems. Puppies may have never been house trained.

Here are some suggestions for dealing with inappropriate urination/defecation:

A trip to the veterinarian. Ruling out a health problem is always the first step with any behavior problem, since many behaviors can have their roots in a medical condition.

Crate training. This is a highly effective method of housebreaking a dog. Contrary to being cruel, it can be a lifesaver if properly used.

Tips for Puppies.

Potty training for puppies should start as soon as the puppy is home. You must be prepared to be patient and observant.

There are six occasions a puppy should be left outside to relieve himself spanning about 20 minutes each time.

- Before going to bed at night
- As soon as they wake up

- After napping during the day
- After eating
- After exuberant play
- After you return home from an outing

Many people take their puppies out for a walk only to see the puppies relieve themselves as soon as they get back indoors. To avoid this, walk the puppy to their toilet area. Stand still with them, allowing the puppy to lose interest in you. Do not sit down as this will only encourage the pup to jump on you and forget what they're out there for. Praise them if they perform. NEVER rub their nose in any mistakes! Positive reinforcement when they do the right thing in the right place is the best and quickest training method.

When training the puppy to go outside to relieve himself, lead them to where you want them to go, stay with them, and praise them when they perform. Note that a male puppy sometimes takes longer to perform than a female. Remember that just like a child, when a puppy has to go, they really have to go! Your puppy cannot travel long distances to relieve them self, so keep the toilet area nearby.

SEPARATION ANXIETY

If your dog howls or barks when you leave or is destructive when you are gone, they may be suffering from separation anxiety.

Your dog may be stressed and they will stay that way – each day – until you come home. They need to learn that is okay for you to go. They need to come to understand that they will be safe and you will come home.

Crate training and positive reinforcement upon your return home are the first steps to take when dealing with separation anxiety. This is a very delicate behavior problem that may need professional help from a trainer. The book *Choosing a Shelter Dog* by Bob Christiansen has some simple tips for working on separation anxiety.



JUMPING ON PEOPLE



Jumping up is all about dog psychology. Dogs communicate with body language. To them, height is dominance, and dogs will naturally jump up on us to test their dominance. You have probably noticed that they do this to each other, too. Correcting this behavior will not only keep your clothes and furniture clean, but it will improve your dog's respect for you.

The best thing to do is to get down to their level. This will even the playing field, and allow your dog to meet you rather than jump up.

NUISANCE BARKING

Nuisance barking is a behavior that may be corrected with love and patience. A dog that barks at birds, noises, the neighbors, passing pedestrians or other dogs is not a good watchdog. A dog like this is similar to a car alarm that keeps going off for no reason. People will eventually take no notice, even when they bark for a legitimate reason. Nuisance barkers will only annoy the entire neighborhood.

Good Barking. A good watchdog is one that barks only when someone attempts to enter your property or when there is imminent danger (house fire, snake in the yard).

Good barking habits can be trained into dogs easily, providing you are clear about exactly when you want your dog to bark. Thus, people will know to respond to a dog's bark because the bark will be a warning and not just an everyday noise.



When left alone. Because dogs are pack animals, they may become stressed when the pack leaves without them (when family leaves them at home alone). Some of the reasons maybe:

- **Separation Anxiety.** Usually identifiable by barking as soon as you leave. You will need to sneak back, catch the dog barking and correct him.
- **Apprehensive/Fearful.** Usually found in the nervous, unconfident dog that barks out of fear of the unknown. He continues to bark because he is not corrected for his barking as no one is home to do so. This dog needs to be socialized. You may need to seek professional help to deal with any serious fears they may have.
- **Territorial.** The territorial dog is usually the dominant, confident type, yet as a rule is not the worst culprit of nuisance barking. However, if you have a problem with this type of dog, you will need to seek professional help, which we can assist with.

Tips on curing nuisance barking.

When at home and the dog is outside barking, go out and correct them by growling “BAD.” We also growl “BAD” loudly so that you can be heard above the barking.

If you use “BAD” every time your dog does something wrong, he will soon catch. Be sure to praise your dog as soon as they stop what they are doing wrong. Monitor the barking and only correct your dog for those things that do not constitute a good watchdog, such as bird noises, neighbors, passing pedestrians and other dogs

DESTRUCTION

PREVENTING DESTRUCTIVE BEHAVIOR IN THE HOME

Why do dogs chew, dig and tear stuff up?

When left alone—either for only a few minutes or for longer periods of time while their humans are away—some dogs dig, chew or destroy household items, like furniture, stray shoes, papers and books, remote controls, the contents of trash cans, and any number of other “illegal” things they can get their paws on. Is it because they get cranky and seek revenge when we leave them at home alone? Is it because they’re challenging our authority? Or is it simply because they’ve all developed a taste for carpeting, upholstery, paper products and newly-planted garden flowers?

Although there are multiple reasons that dogs become destructive in the home, most are actually pretty simple and understandable:



- **Dogs of all ages (yes, adult dogs too) need to chew on things regularly,** both to exercise their jaws and satisfy their deeply rooted instincts to chew and rip things apart. It’s just a normal part of being a dog. So it makes sense that dogs actively seek things to chew. If you don’t provide appropriate and appealing options, your dog will find things to chew on their own. Most dogs gnaw on our stuff simply because we haven’t given them “legal” alternatives.

- **Many pet dogs are under exercised and/or bored.** If you’re a dog, life in a human world can be hard! Many pet dogs spend a lot of time by themselves, waiting around for opportunities to interact with their people. That probably gets pretty dull. Virtually all dogs need jobs—ways to occupy themselves and outlets for their natural canine urges, like chasing, sniffing, tugging, digging and chewing. If you provide adequate mental and physical stimulation for your dog, it’s much less likely that they’ll come up with their own “jobs,” like digging up flower beds, dissecting your couch and sampling your newheels.

- **Dogs often chew and destroy things when left alone because they’re anxious and lonely.** Dogs are social animals, and they sometimes have trouble adapting to long periods of isolation. When your dog’s home alone, they’re probably a little stressed out. In response to stress, many dogs resort to performing soothing, repetitive canine behaviors to relieve their anxiety. Some chew things up, some tear things apart, and some dig in dirt or on

carpeting. We perform stress-relieving behaviors when we're anxious too. They're just a little different. Instead of gnawing on table legs, we engage in things like nail biting, pacing and fidgeting.

So how do I prevent or stop my dog from “redecorating” my home?

The main thing to remember is that, although it can sometimes seem like dogs engage in naughty, destructive behaviors out of stubbornness or sheer defiance of our human wishes, it's actually not that complicated. Dogs usually take up illegal doggie hobbies simply because they haven't been taught to do otherwise. It's not that your dog is getting back at you for something you did or planning a coup to overthrow the human power structure. It's just that they need to satisfy their natural urges, and hasn't yet figured out how to do that in ways that are acceptable to you. How can you help them get with the program? Prevent and provide.

Prevent Mistakes

Set your dog up to succeed by making it literally impossible for them to make “wrong” choices. Always supervise your dog when you're home together. Keep off-limits items out of reach and your eyeballs on your dog at all times. If they put something in their mouth that they shouldn't, just redirect their attention to one of their own toys instead. If you can't directly supervise your dog when you're at home or while you're away, put them in a crate or a dog-proofed room, free of things they might destroy.

Provide Legal Alternatives

Now you know how to prevent your dog from making mistakes and chewing on or destroying things in your home. In addition to doing that, you also need to help your dog focus on playing with their *own* stuff, rather than yours. (Remember, they still need outlets for their instinctual behaviors.) Here are some great things to try:

- Provide plenty of inedible chew items, like Nylabones and hard rubber toys.
- Also provide edible chews, like rawhide, marrow bones, bully sticks and pig ears. (You'll want to stick around when you give your dog these, just to be sure that your dog doesn't swallow too big a piece of a chew and choke. If you're unsure about whether or not—or how often—you should give your dog edible chew things, call your veterinarian.)
- Try buying a few food puzzle toys. Using them will give your dog's brain and jaws a great work-out! Here are some of our favorites:
 - ~ The Kong: a tough, hollow rubber toy that you can fill with kibble, treats, soft dog food, a little cream cheese or peanut butter, etc. You can also freeze these toys after packing them with food/treats, so they pose more of a challenge to your dog.
 - ~ Buster Cubes: a hard, square puzzle toy that has a “maze” inside. You pour dry kibble into the toy, and then your dog rolls it around on the floor to get the food to come out, a few pieces at a time.
 - ~ Premier's Tug-a-Jug: a hard, hollow bottle-shaped toy with a rope attached. You can put food inside for your dog to get out AND use the Tug-a-Jug as an interactive tug toy too!

To keep your dog extra-employed, you can feed them all of their meals in puzzle toys instead of a bowl. That way, they'll have to work to get their chow out of the toys, which will challenge and entertain them. When your dog becomes a puzzle-toy pro, you can even hide them around the house before you leave your dog home alone, and then they can “hunt” their breakfast or dinner while you're gone!

Increase Freedom Slowly

If you prevent your dog from engaging in destructive behavior AND, at the same time, get them hooked on their own chews and toys, the new good habits you've encouraged will replace the old ones you want to eliminate. After you've managed your dog's behavior carefully for a few months, making sure that they don't have *any* opportunities to make mistakes and gnaw on things they shouldn't, you can gradually increase their freedom. Supervise diligently as you allow more and more access to areas in your home that aren't 100% dog-proofed, so that you can interrupt any unwanted behavior and redirect your dog's attention toward acceptable alternatives.

When you leave your dog home alone, we recommend continuing to keep them in their dog-proofed area or crate, always remembering to provide plenty of toys and chews to keep them busy.

Other Tips & Info

- If you leave your dog alone and then return later to find that they've destroyed something, it is WAY TOO LATE to punish them. Dogs' brains don't move forward and backward in time the way ours do, so your dog won't understand

if you yell at them after the fact (even a minute or two later). They may look “guilty,” but that’s probably because they’ve learned that when you look unhappy (which you undoubtedly will if you’ve just discovered that your dog shredded your couch while you were at work), it’s Bad News for them. They *will* read your body language and realize that you’re about to do something unpleasant to them—but they *won’t* know why.

- Try coating things your dog shouldn’t chew with Grannick’s Bitter Apple, a spray that tastes really bad but won’t damage most furniture/objects. It may help deter your dog. If their favorite, normally delicious armchair suddenly has a new, horrible flavor, it’ll probably make a big impression. They may never go near it again....
- Rotate your dog’s toys and chews to keep them interesting, and give your dog something new and exciting every once in a while. Novelty IS the spice of life, after all.
- Digging, like chewing and other destructive behaviors, relieves boredom and stress, so if your dog engages in this behavior, they may need more quality time with you and something else to do when you’re not around to provide companionship and stimulation. If your dog spends time alone in the yard and digs, consider reducing their time outside. They’d probably rather be inside with you. When your dog *is* hanging out in the yard, make sure they have plenty of toys and things to chew on. You can also try building or buying them a sandbox, where they ARE allowed to satisfy the urge to dig. Bury some of their toys in it to encourage them to try it out. Dogs also dig if they need a cool place to lie down, so be sure to provide shade and shelter for your dog when they’re spending time outside, especially during warm weather.
- Tire your dog out. It will help to increase your dog’s mental and physical exercise in general. A tired dog is a good dog! Investigate options like doggie daycare and dog sports, like agility and flyball. Take your dog on walks or to dog parks on a regular basis. Teach your dog to fetch and tug. Consider hiring a dog walker if you’re gone all day. Take your dog to an obedience class that teaches fun, reward-based methods. If you wear your dog out with training, games and exercise, they’ll be way more likely to sleep like a log whenever they’re left alone—instead of staying awake to chew, dig or destroy your stuff.
- As we mentioned above, most dogs get a little anxious when left alone. However, some dogs experience *extreme* anxiety when isolated or in response to certain stimuli, like unusual noises or thunderstorms. If, in addition to destructive behavior, you notice behaviors like excessive drooling or vocalization, shaking, urinating or defecating indoors, panting and/or pacing, contact us for advice.

PUPPY TRAINING

Potty training for puppies should start as soon as the puppy is home. You must be prepared to be patient and observant.



There are six occasions a puppy should be left outside to relieve himself spanning about 20 minutes each time.

- Before going to bed at night
- As soon as they wake up
- After napping during the day
- After eating
- After exuberant play
- After you return home from an outing

Many people take their puppies out for a walk only to see the puppies relieve themselves as soon as they get back indoors. To avoid this, walk the puppy to their toilet area. Stand still with them, allowing the puppy to lose interest in you. Do not sit down as this will only encourage the pup to jump on you and forget what they’re out there for. Praise them if they perform. NEVER rub their nose in any mistakes! Positive reinforcement when they do the right thing in the right place is the best and quickest training method.

When training the puppy to go outside to relieve himself, lead them to where you want them to go, stay with them, and praise them when they perform. Note that a male puppy sometimes takes longer to perform than a female. Remember that just like a child, when a puppy has to go, they really have to go! Your puppy cannot travel long distances to relieve them self, so keep the toilet area nearby.

A young puppy that barks at people or noises is a good indication of a budding nuisance barker. This is a nervous pup that worries about everything. A well-adjusted pup will not usually start barking until somewhere between 8 to 12 months of age.

If you have a pup that is starting to bark at everything that moves, discipline them by growling “BAD” at the precise moment they start. Praise them as soon as they respond.

Clapping your hands or throwing an object onto the ground near the pup, such as a can of pebbles, (careful not to hit the pup) and at the same time growling a correction word (BAD) should help stop any premature barking. A puppy that persists even after correction could need some socializing.

CRATE TRAINING

Used properly, a crate is an effective short-term tool for managing and training your dog. If you train your dog to be content in a crate, you'll provide a safe, cozy place that they can call their own and sleep in at night. It also gives you a safe way to transport your dog and travel with them to motels, to friends' homes, when on vacation, etc. Crates are especially helpful when introducing a new dog into your household. You can also use a crate to efficiently house train your dog and prevent them from being destructive.

Crates can be easily misused, however. They're best used as a relatively short-term management tool, not as a lifetime pattern of housing. Your goal should be to work on any behavior problems and train your dog so that it's not necessary to crate them 8 to 10 hours every weekday throughout their life. Please see our crate guidelines below, under How Long to Crate Your Dog, to avoid over-confinement and inadvertently causing behavior problems from a lack of exercise, training, socialization and companionship.



Some dogs are never happy in crates but can tolerate them when necessary. Others panic when closed in a crate (please see more information below under When NOT to Use a Crate). However, most dogs readily adjust to their crates, preferring to sleep or take refuge in them when they're tired or things get too hectic.

Using a Crate to House Train Your Dog

You can use a crate to safely contain your dog during the night and whenever you can't monitor their behavior closely. Dogs don't like to soil their sleeping areas, so your dog should naturally avoid eliminating in their crate. If used for house training purposes, the crate should be sized so that your dog can lie down comfortably, stand up without having to crouch and easily turn around in a circle. If the crate is any larger, they might learn to soil one end of it and sleep at the other. If the crate is any smaller, they might be uncomfortable and unable to rest. (When you no longer need to use the crate for house training, you can purchase a larger one for your dog if you like.)

Using a crate will help you predict when your dog needs to eliminate and control where they eliminate. If they've been crated overnight or for a few hours during the day, the chances are extremely high that they'll eliminate as soon as you release them from the crate and take them outside. So, with the crate's help, you can prevent your dog from eliminating indoors and have a chance to reward them for going in the right place—outside.

Using a Crate to Prevent Destructive Behavior

In addition to acting as a house-training tool, your dog's crate can prevent them from being destructive. Dogs and puppies need to learn to refrain from doing a lot of things in their homes, like digging on furniture or rugs, chewing

table legs, cushions or other household items, and stealing from garbage cans or counters. To teach your dog not to do things you don't like, you must be able to observe and monitor their behavior. Confining them in a crate can prevent unwanted behavior when you can't supervise them or have to leave them home alone.

How Long to Crate Your Dog

At night when dogs sleep, their body systems and elimination slow down. This is why they can go all night without eliminating once they're old enough to have sufficient bladder and bowel control. But during the day, neither puppies nor adult dogs should be crated for more than four or five hours at a time. When crating a puppy for more than two hours, it's best to provide water by attaching a water bottle dispenser to the crate. (Using a bowl can create a mess.) Follow these daytime duration guidelines to avoid compromising your dog's well-being or causing behavior problems:

Age Maximum time in crate

8–10 weeks 30–60 minutes

11–14 weeks 1–3 hours

15–16 weeks 3–4 hours

17+ weeks 4–5 hours



If you have a puppy and you work all day, it's essential that you give your puppy a midday break from the crate every day for at least the first eight months. Even with a break, though, your puppy will still have to tolerate two four-hour periods of confinement. That's a long time, so make sure they get a good romp in the morning before you leave for work, during lunch and after work. If you can't go home during your lunch break, you can hire a dog walker to visit your puppy midday, but keep in mind that they still need quality time with you. They should get to enjoy some playtime in the morning and another play and training session when you come home from work.

If you're using the crate for house training, remember that it's a temporary tool. Your goal is to create a dog who can be trusted to have freedom in at least part of your house while you're gone. When you've accomplished this, you can still keep the crate for your dog to sleep or hang out in. Just remove the door or leave it open.

An adult dog can be crated for as long as eight hours on occasion, but daily crating of this length could compromise your dog's mental and physical well-being. Be sure that they've received adequate exercise before a long stay in the crate—at least 30 to 60 minutes. If your dog is crated overnight as well, they should receive at least 60 to 90 minutes of outdoor exercise in the morning and before being put back in the crate at night.

When NOT to Use a Crate

Dogs who suffer from separation anxiety should not be confined in a crate. If your dog shows any of the following signs of separation anxiety, please contact us for assistance in locating a professional trainer:

- Destructiveness, vocalizing or house soiling during the first 30 minutes after you leave your dog alone in the house
- Destructive behaviors that consistently occur only when they're left alone in the house
- Destructive behavior directed at windows, doors, flooring in front of doors or items with your scent, like seat cushions or the TV remote
- Some dogs don't tolerate crating well due to other types of fears or anxieties, like thunder phobia. Don't crate your dog if you see signs of anxiety when they're crated, such as:
 - Damage to the crate from your dog's attempts to escape
 - Damage to surrounding objects that they've been able to reach while inside the crate
 - Wet chest fur or a lot of wetness in the bottom of the crate from drooling
 - Urination or defecation in the crate
 - Your dog moves the crate while they're inside

- Excessive barking or howling during your absence (You can get reports from neighbors or record your dog's behavior using a video camera.)
- In addition, don't crate your puppy or dog if:
 - They're too young to have sufficient bladder or bowel control
 - They have diarrhea
 - They're vomiting
 - You must leave them alone for longer than the time indicated in the crate duration guidelines above
 - They haven't eliminated shortly before going in the crate
 - The temperature is uncomfortably high
 - They have not had sufficient exercise, companionship and socialization

HOW TO CRATE TRAIN YOUR DOG: THE WEEKEND PLAN

Some trainers and behaviorists recommend introducing your dog to a new crate very gradually, over a period of a week or more. This method works well for timid dogs who fear confinement and for dogs who have already learned to dislike crates. But many dogs can learn to use crates more easily, and many people just don't have the time to devote an entire week or more to training before being able to use a crate.

If you need to start using a crate as soon as possible, try the following Weekend Crate Training plan. After your training sessions on Saturday and Sunday, you'll be able to start confining your dog in their crate on Monday.

To successfully use this crate-training plan, you'll need to follow the directions below, step by step. It's important to avoid skipping ahead and leaving your dog alone in the crate before they're ready. To confine your dog at night over the weekend, put them in a small, safe area instead. You can use an exercise pen or baby gate to block off part of your kitchen, a bathroom or a laundry room. Make sure that the area is dog-proofed and free of things that your dog shouldn't chew. You can leave them with something comfy to lie on, some water, their toys and some chew things to keep them occupied. It's best not to leave your dog home alone at all during the day on Saturday or Sunday. If you must do so for some reason, you can use the same dog-proofed area so as not to deviate from your training plan.

Preparation

Choosing a Crate

Pet supply stores and online vendors sell wire crates, plastic airline crates and mesh crates. Each style has its own advantages. Wire crates usually collapse for easy storage and portability, and they provide more ventilation than plastic ones. Plastic crates seem especially den-like and might make dogs feel safer and more secure when they're inside. Mesh crates provide privacy for dogs and are the most portable, but they aren't very durable. Some dogs chew through them and escape.

Comfy Crate

After choosing which kind of crate to use, it's important to make the new crate comfortable. Put it in a room where you spend lots of time, but out of the way of foot traffic. Next, put a soft bed or blanket and a toy or two inside. You can even put a shirt you've recently worn into the crate so your dog will feel comforted by your scent. (If your dog likes to chew fabric, you can skip this part.) If you purchase a wire crate for your dog, THEY might like to have a blanket or towel draped over it to create a more "den-like" feel.



Friday Night: Before You Start Training

The most important part of crate training is teaching your dog to associate the crate with things they love. Try the ideas below to convince your dog that their new crate is the place to be:

The Treat Fairy

Leave the crate door wide open and make sure your dog has access to the room where you've set up the crate. Every so often, when they're not looking, sneakily toss a few treats around and into the crate so they can discover them on their own. Use something that your dog will love, like small pieces of chicken, cheese, hot dog or freeze-dried liver. You can also leave an exciting new toy, a delicious chew bone or a stuffed KONG® toy inside the crate. Periodically leave special treats in your dog's crate throughout the evening—and continue to do so every day or so for the next few weeks. If your dog sometimes finds surprise goodies in their crate, they'll start to love it, and they'll probably go into it often just to see if the "Treat Fairy" has come.

Room Service

When it's dinnertime for your dog, place their bowl inside the crate and leave the door open. Try putting the bowl in the back of the crate so your dog has to stand inside the crate to eat. If they seem too uncomfortable to go into the crate at first, you can put the bowl just inside the door instead. That way, they only have to put their head in the crate. Over time, as your dog becomes more and more comfortable stepping inside, you can move the bowl all the way to the back of the crate and, eventually, close the crate door while they eat their meals.



Prepare Supplies for Saturday and Sunday

Over the next couple of days, you'll reward your dog often for going into the crate. It's a good idea to prepare some treats in advance. Cut some chicken, cheese, hot dogs, soft dog treats or freeze-dried liver into bite-sized pieces and set them aside for later use. You can also stuff two or three KONGs, which you'll give your dog when you start to increase the length of time they stay in the crate.

Saturday Morning: Let the Crate Fun Begin!

You're ready to get started. Gather the treats you prepared and take your dog to the crate.

Step One: Follow the Treat

You can do the following exercises sitting on the floor or in a chair right next to the crate.

Give a cue to ask your dog to go into the crate, such as "Go to bed." (Choose whatever cue you like, just be sure you always use the same one.)

Show your dog one of the treats and toss it in the crate. After they go inside to eat it, praise them enthusiastically and feed them another treat while they're still inside.

Say "Okay" to let your dog know they can come out again. You don't need to reward when they come out of the crate. They need to learn that all good things happen when they're inside the crate.

Repeat the steps above 10 times. Take a short break (just a few minutes), and then do another set of 10 repetitions. After your second set, end the training session.

Step Two: Earn the Treat

Later on in the morning, collect some treats and bring your dog to the crate for more training. Now that they've practiced following a treat into the crate, try asking them to go in before rewarding with the treat.

To warm up, do a couple of repetitions just like you did before—throwing the treat into the crate so that your dog follows it. Then you can change the rules a little.

Give your cue, "Go to bed," and point to the crate instead of throwing a treat into it. (When you point, it might help to move your arm like you did when tossing a treat into the crate. The familiar motion can remind your dog what they're supposed to do.)

When your dog goes in, praise them and immediately give a couple of treats while they're still in the crate. Say "Okay" and let your dog come out of the crate.

Do 10 repetitions and then take a short break. Repeat the exercise another 10 times—or until your dog seems to know the game and enters and exits readily when asked.

If your dog seems nervous about going into the crate or confused about what they're supposed to do when you say the cue, go back and practice Step One for a while longer. When your dog confidently rushes into the crate to get the treat, you can try Step Two again.

Saturday Afternoon: Close the Crate Door

Now it's time to get your dog used to being in the crate with the door closed.

To warm up, do a couple of repetitions just like you did before. Say "Go to bed," point to the crate, reward your dog with a treat when they go in and then say "Okay" to let them know they can come out.

Now you'll try closing the crate door for just a moment. Give your cue "Go to bed" and point to the crate. When your dog goes in the crate, praise them and immediately give a treat. Then gently close the crate door. (You don't have to latch it yet.) Feed your dog two or three treats through the closed crate door and continue to praise them while they're in the crate.

Say "Okay" and open the crate door to let your dog come out. (If your dog seems stressed or panicked with the door briefly closed, break down this exercise into two phases: in the first phase, just close the door halfway, give a treat and release your dog; in the second phase, close the door all the way.)

Do 10 repetitions and then take a break for a minute or two. Then repeat the exercise 10 more times, slowly building up the time your dog stays in the crate with the door closed. As you increase the time, throw in some easy repetitions, too. Start with 1 second, then increase to 5. Try 8 seconds, then go back to 3. Increase to 10 seconds, then 15, then 20, then an easy 5. Continue to generously reward your dog whenever they're in the crate. After you finish your second set of 10 repetitions, take a half-hour break. Then repeat the exercise again. Over the afternoon, try to build up to having your dog stay in the crate for one minute.



Saturday Evening: Introduction to Alone Time

When your dog is used to hanging out in the crate with the door closed while you sit nearby, you can move on to the next step: leaving them alone for a little while. Repeat the exercise you've been practicing, just as it's described above—but this time, latch the crate door and start to move away from the crate.

To warm up, do a couple of repetitions like you did in the afternoon. Sit on the floor or in a chair next to your dog's crate. Say "Go to bed" and point to the crate. When your dog goes in, close the crate door and reward with a few treats while they stay in the crate. After about 30 seconds, say "Okay" and open the crate door to let your dog out. Now you'll close the crate door briefly. Say your cue, "Go to bed," and point to the crate. When your dog goes in, close and latch the crate door, and then give a treat.

Stand up and give your dog another treat. Take a few steps away from the crate and then return to give your dog a treat.

Say "Okay" and open the crate door to let your dog come out.

Repeat the steps above 10 times, each time walking away in a different direction. After a short break, do 10 more repetitions, slowly building up the time your dog stays in the crate while you walk around the room. As you increase the time, throw in some easy repetitions. Start with 10 seconds, then increase to 15. Try 20 seconds, then go back to 10. Increase to 30 seconds, drop to 15, then up to 45, and then an easy 5. Continue to return to the crate and reward your dog every few seconds while they're inside. In the beginning, be very generous. As your dog becomes more and more comfortable resting in the crate, you can gradually decrease how frequently you treat.

After you finish your second set of 10 repetitions, take a half-hour break. Then repeat the exercise another 10 times. Start leaving the room for a few seconds at a time, always returning to reward your dog while they're in the crate. Try to work up to having your dog stay in the crate for one minute while you walk around the room and briefly leave the room.

Sunday Morning: TV Time

This morning, you'll teach your dog to relax for longer periods in the crate. You'll need some treats, a new tasty chew bone or a KONG toy stuffed with something wonderful, like a little peanut butter or cream cheese, and something to occupy yourself. Ask your dog to go in the crate. When they do, praise them and give them the chew bone or stuffed KONG. Then close the crate door and settle down to watch TV or read a book in the same room. Keep your dog in the crate for about half an hour. (If they finish the chew, you can periodically give a treat or two, as long as they stay quiet.)

When the half hour is up, calmly open the crate and say "Okay," so that your dog can come out. Take the chew thing away, and don't reward with treats when crate time is over. In fact, it's best if you just ignore your dog for a few minutes. Again, you want them to learn that great things happen while they're in the crate, not when they come out. Take a break from training for a while. An hour or two later, you can repeat the exercise.

Canine Complaining

At this point in your training, your dog might start to object to confinement in the crate. If they bark or whine, you have two options:

Ignore them entirely. (Get yourself a pair of earplugs if you need to.) They're trying to get your attention, so don't reward barking by giving it to them! Pretend they're invisible. As soon as they stop vocalizing for a few seconds, you can give a treat. With repetition, your dog will learn that they get ignored if they make noise, but if they're quiet, you deliver tasty treats.

As soon as your dog starts to bark or whine, make some sort of noise to let them know they've made a mistake. You can say "Oops!" or "Too bad," and then immediately leave the room. Don't come back until your dog has been quiet for at least 5 to 10 seconds. With repetition, your dog will learn that making noise makes you instantly leave but being quiet makes you come back.

It's important that you respond consistently when your dog makes noise in the crate. It might be frustrating at first, but if you stick to your plan, they'll learn that it's in their best interest to rest quietly when crated.

Sunday Afternoon: Alone Time

Before moving on to Sunday afternoon exercises, give your dog a good workout. Take them outside on a brisk walk or jog, play fetch or tug, or give them a chance to play with a dog buddy. Crate training will be easier if they're tired. After you've exercised your dog, repeat the training steps you practiced this morning, but this time, instead of settling down to relax in the same room as your dog, you'll move around the house.

Ask your dog to go in the crate. When they do, hand them a delicious chew bone or a stuffed KONG. Then close the crate door and walk out of the room.

Stay out of the room for 10 minutes. After the time's up, you can return and let your dog out of the crate. (If they haven't finished working on the chew thing, take it away after they leave the crate. They only get special goodies during crate time.) If your dog makes noise in the crate while you're gone, don't return to let them out until they've been quiet for 5 to 10 seconds.

After a short break, repeat the exercise.

This afternoon, continue to repeat the steps above, slowly building up the time your dog stays in the crate. Try to work up to one full hour of alone time.

Sunday Evening: Time to Leave the House

If your dog can quietly rest in the crate for an hour while you move around the house, you're ready to leave them home alone. Ask your dog to go in the crate and give them something delicious to chew or eat, just like you did before. Then close the crate and, without saying any goodbyes, leave the house for about 10 minutes. When you return, calmly let your dog out of the crate and take away the chew. Resist the urge to celebrate. Your dog will feel most comfortable going into and out of the crate if you act like it's no big deal.

Repeat the exercise as often as possible before bedtime, with exercise and potty breaks in between training times. Try to build up to leaving your dog in the crate, home alone, for an hour or two.

The Weekend's Over... What Next?

Now that you've completed the Weekend Crate Training plan, your dog can start to stay in the crate whenever you leave the house, overnight and when you can't directly supervise them during the day. Abide by the crate duration guidelines above, and keep the following tips in mind to make sure your dog continues to feel comfortable in the crate:

- Always try to thoroughly exercise your dog before crating them. (Aim for at least 30 to 60 minutes of aerobic exercise.) If you crate your dog while you're at work and overnight, they'll need lots of quality play time and exercise with you when they're not in their crate.
- Always take your dog out for a potty break before crating and right after letting them out of the crate.
- Continue to feed your dog their meals inside the crate and always leave them with something to chew when they're in the crate. (Speak with your veterinarian for advice about what's safe for your dog to chew while they're alone.) If you reserve special things, like dinner, new chew bones, stuffed KONGs and pig ears for crate time, your dog will learn to love going into the crate.
- Leave your dog's crate open so that they can access it at all times. Many dogs choose to rest inside their crates even when they don't have to.

Having Trouble?

Crate training can be challenging for some dogs, so don't hesitate to enlist the help of a Certified Professional Dog Trainer (CPDT) in your area. A professional trainer will offer group or private classes that can provide lots of help with crate training.

Troubleshooting

My Dog Makes Noise in the Crate

Although it might be difficult, resist the urge to yell at your dog if they complain in their crate. They might respond by quieting down—but the attention from you, even though it's negative attention, might increase their barking and whining instead. Scolding might also upset your dog, and you want to make their time in the crate as stress-free as possible. It's also crucial to avoid breaking down and releasing your dog from the crate when they're making noise. Doing this will send a clear message: If they bark and whine long enough, you'll eventually let them out! The key is to teach your dog that you won't let them out of the crate if they're making noise—but you will reward with treats or let them out if they stop.

However, if you have a young puppy, they might not be able to sleep through the night without having to eliminate. If your puppy whines in the middle of the night and you think they might need to go out, do let them out of the crate. Then you can take them directly to the place where you'd like them to eliminate and wait. If they don't go within a minute or two, take them back inside and return them to the crate. Don't let them romp around during the potty break. You don't want them to learn that if they whine in the crate, you'll take them out for playtime!

My Dog Is Afraid to Go Into the Crate

Dogs who seem very nervous about going into crates might need preliminary training with crate-like objects. If your dog seems reluctant to step into a crate, you can try teaching them to walk under a suspended tarp or blanket, step between two upright boards or lie down in the bottom half of an airline crate (with the top removed) before trying to coax them into an enclosed crate. When you start training with an airline or wire crate, it might make your dog more comfortable to remove the door or simply leave it ajar. If you have a mesh crate, flip the door up over the roof to keep it open. It can also help to teach your dog Sit, Down, Stay, Step Forward and Step Back. These skills will give you more control when you're asking your dog to do specific behaviors in and around the crate.

After some preliminary training with less scary crate-like objects, you can try Weekend Crate Training, but instead of spending a day on each step, try going through the plan more slowly. Only progress to the next step when your dog seems completely comfortable.

My Dog Panics in the Crate

If your dog experiences extreme anxiety when you try to confine them in a crate, let them out immediately and seek the help of a Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist (CAAB), a veterinary behaviorist (Dip ACVB) or a Certified Professional Dog Trainer (CPDT).

My Dog Guards Things or Behaves Aggressively in Her Crate

Dogs who guard their belongings sometimes also guard the area around their crates. If your dog has guarded objects, food or places in the past, always be cautious when walking by their open crate or when removing them from the crate. Avoid reaching into the crate to pull your dog out. Instead, you can entice them out or lift the crate up from the back to "spill" them out.

Some dogs seem to feel vulnerable and trapped when they're in crates or other small spaces. These dogs might react with aggression when approached by unfamiliar people or dogs while inside their crates. If this sounds like your dog, please seek guidance from a Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist (CAAB), a veterinary behaviorist (Dip ACVB) or a Certified Professional Dog Trainer (CPDT).

Decreasing Confinement, Increasing Freedom

You can begin to give your dog more freedom in your house while you're gone once they're thoroughly house trained, has eliminated consistently outside with no accidents for at least one month, and chews or destroys only their own toys—not your house or household items. The right time to give your dog more freedom will depend on their individual personality. Some dogs can be destructive when alone until they are about two years old, while others can be trusted at one year or less.

Here are some suggested steps toward increasing your dog's freedom outside the crate:

Start with brief absences with your dog free in your house. Be sure to dog-proof your home before you go. Put your garbage away and pick up items you don't want your dog to chew. Leave out several toys that they can chew. You want to set them up to succeed!

Don't give freedom of the whole house at first. Use baby gates or close doors to prevent them from getting into rooms you don't want them in yet. Or try confining to just one room, like the kitchen or laundry room.

Walk out the door and run a short five-minute errand. If you come home to a mess, try a shorter absence.

If, after a couple more attempts at short absences, your dog is still making messes, they might not be mature enough to be left alone in the house yet. Alternatively, their continued destructiveness might mean they have separation anxiety.

If you return and there are no messes, gradually lengthen your absences. For example, start with five minutes. Then try a half-hour, then an hour, then two hours and, finally, four or five hours (the maximum recommended length of time).

What NOT to Do

Do not use a crate to contain your dog simply because they're a nuisance and require attention. A puppy or young dog can sometimes be annoying and exhausting, but it's unfair and negligent to lock them up rather than provide the training they need.

Do not put your dog in the crate to punish them. If you do, they'll probably come to dislike the crate. It's fine to use the crate sparingly as a time-out place, but your dog should have many more pleasant experiences with their crate to counteract any possible unpleasant associations.

FOOD GUARDING

Guarding possessions from humans or other animals is normal behavior for dogs. Wild animals who successfully protect their valuable resources—such as food, mates and living areas—are more likely to survive in the wild than those who don't. However, we find the tendency to guard valued items undesirable in our domestic pets, especially when the behavior is directed toward people.



Resource guarding in dogs can range from relatively benign behavior, like running away with a coveted item or growling at an approaching person, to full-blown aggression, such as biting or chasing a person away. Some dogs only direct resource guarding toward certain people, often strangers. Other dogs guard their resources from all people. Dogs vary in what they consider valuable. Some dogs only guard chew bones or toys. Some guard stolen items, such as food wrappers from the trash can or socks. Many dogs guard food.

In many cases, food guarding doesn't need to be treated. Plenty of adult dog parents with food guarding dogs simply take reasonable precautions to ensure everyone's safety. They leave their dogs alone while they're eating, or they might even feed their dogs in a separate room, in a crate or behind a barrier. They provide their dogs with adequate amounts of food so that their dogs feel less motivated to guard. They never attempt to take away stolen or scavenged food from their dogs.

However, if children live in a home with a resource-guarding dog, the situation becomes unacceptably risky. Children are more likely to get bitten because they're less able to recognize a dog's warning signals and more likely to behave recklessly around the dog. In some cases, the risk of living with a dog who guards resources is too high for adults, too. For example, some dogs guard food on tables and counters, leftover food on dishes in the dishwasher and food dropped on the floor. Because it's impossible to avoid these situations, it's impossible to prevent the guarding behavior.

An Ounce of Prevention

Young puppies are prone to guarding behavior because they often have to compete with their littermates for limited amounts of food. People often feed puppies from one large communal pan, and the puppy who manages to eat the most will grow the quickest and become the strongest. If you're not observant, this situation can deteriorate into one or two puppies monopolizing most of the food. A history of being rewarded for aggressive behavior can become firmly established in these puppies.



If you have a new puppy or adult dog who doesn't guard things, it's important to do some simple exercises to prevent the development of guarding behavior. As soon as you bring your new dog home, make sure you hand feed several meals. Sit with your dog and give them their kibble one bite at a time. During hand-fed meals, speak pleasantly to your dog and stroke them while you offer food with your other hand. If they show any discomfort or wariness, stop hand feeding him and see the exercises

outlined below. If your dog seems calm and comfortable with hand feeding, switch to holding their bowl in your lap and allowing them to eat from the bowl. Continue to speak to them and stroke their head and body while they eat. After a few meals, place your dog's bowl on the floor and, as they eat their regular chow, periodically reach down to drop in a piece of something especially tasty, like a small bite of cheese, chicken or beef. If you do this intermittently for the first few months after you bring your dog home, they should remain relaxed and unthreatened by your presence while they eat.

Some Precautions

If you think your dog is likely to bite you, please do not attempt to resolve his resource guarding on your own. Doing so could place you in serious harm, especially if your dog has a history of biting or has attempted to bite in the past. Consult with a Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist (CAAB or ACAAB), a board-certified veterinary behaviorist (Dip ACVB), or a Certified Professional Dog Trainer (CPDT). If you need assistance, we can help you find an appropriate match.

With some dogs, treatment for food guarding can be tricky. If you attempt the exercises below and your dog appears stressed and refuses to eat—but still guards the bowl—discontinue the exercises immediately and seek help from a behaviorist or qualified trainer. You'll also want to seek help from one of these professionals if you're able to do the exercises below for a while but hit a point at which your dog does not progress further.

Treatment Exercises for Food Guarding

The treatments used for food guarding are desensitization combined with counterconditioning. They're highly effective but fairly complex and detailed.

The exercises described below are done in stages. After doing the exercises in one stage, you can progress to the next stage if your dog is relaxed and shows no signs of aggression. Dog body language can be complex, so it's sometimes difficult to tell how a dog feels at any given moment. To determine what your dog looks like when relaxed, take note of what their body, ears, eyes and tail do when you know they're in a situation they find pleasant. For example, notice what your dog looks like when you both are relaxing together on the couch or taking a leisurely walk. Signs that a dog feels calm and content include a relaxed posture (muscles relaxed, not tensed), normal breathing or slight panting, eating at a normal pace, wagging and wiggling. Signs of aggression to watch for while you're doing exercises include standing stiffly over the bowl, gulping the food, tensing or freezing, growling, staring, snapping, snarling, biting or chasing people away. If you see any of these signs, stop immediately and contact a Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist, a board-certified veterinary behaviorist, or a qualified Certified Professional Dog Trainer.

If you're unsure about your dog's reaction to the exercises, tether them to something sturdy. That way, if your dog moves toward you, they will be restrained by the leash.

Before you start any of the exercises below, cut a number of special treats into bite-sized pieces for your dog. You'll need to use something your dog absolutely loves and doesn't get to eat at other times, like small bits of chicken, beef, hot dogs or cheese. The idea is to convince your dog that it's wonderful when you approach them while they're eating because you might bring them something much better than what they have in their bowl.

Stage One

- Stand a few feet away from your dog while they eat dry kibble from a bowl on the floor. Do not move toward your dog.
- Say something like, "What have you got there?" in a conversational tone and, at the same time, toss a special treat toward the bowl. Continue to do this every few seconds until your dog finishes eating the kibble.
- Repeat this exercise each time you feed your dog until they eat in a relaxed way for 10 meals in a row. Then you can move on to Stage Two.

During your exercises, if your dog leaves the bowl and moves toward you to ask for more treats, just ignore them. Wait until they go back to the bowl and start eating again before tossing more tasty treats.

Stage Two

- While your dog eats dry kibble from a bowl on the floor, say “What have you got there?” in a conversational tone. At the same time, take one step toward them and toss a special treat toward the bowl. Then immediately step back. Repeat this sequence every few seconds until your dog has finished eating.
- Each day, take one step closer to your dog before tossing them the special treat. Continue at this stage until you come within two feet of the bowl. When your dog eats in a relaxed way for 10 meals in a row as you repeatedly approach and stand two feet away and give them a treat, you’re ready to move to the next stage.

Stage Three

- While your dog eats dry kibble from a bowl on the floor, approach them saying “What have you got there?” in a conversational tone. Stand next to your dog’s bowl and drop a special treat into it. Then immediately turn around and walk away.
- Repeat this sequence every few seconds until your dog has finished eating. When they eat in a relaxed way for 10 meals in a row, you’re ready for the next stage.

Stage Four

- While your dog eats dry kibble from a bowl on the floor, approach them saying “What have you got there?” in a conversational tone. Stand next to your dog, holding a special treat in your hand. Bend down slightly, holding the treat out just an inch or two in your dog’s direction. Encourage them to stop eating the food in the bowl to take the treat. After they eat the treat from your hand, immediately turn around and walk away. Repeat this sequence every few seconds until your dog has finished eating.
- Each day, bend down a little more when you offer your dog the special treat so that your hand moves an inch or two closer to the bowl. Stay at this stage until you can bend down and hold your hand with the treat right next to your dog’s bowl. When your dog eats relaxed for 10 meals in a row as you repeatedly approach to bend down and offer a treat next to the bowl, you’re ready for the next stage.

Stage Five

- While your dog eats dry kibble from a bowl on the floor, approach them saying “What have you got there?” in a conversational tone. Stand next to your dog, bend down and touch the bowl with one hand while offering a special treat with your other hand.
- Continue to do this every few seconds until your dog has finished the food in the bowl. When your dog eats relaxed for 10 meals in a row, you can move to the next stage.

Stage Six

- While your dog eats dry kibble from a bowl on the floor, approach them saying “What have you got there?” in a conversational tone. Stand next to your dog, bend and pick up the bowl with one hand. Raise it only six inches off the floor and drop a special treat in the bowl. Then immediately return the bowl to the floor so that your dog can eat from it.
- Continue to do this every few seconds until your dog has finished all the food in the bowl. As you repeat the sequence, raise the bowl slightly higher off the floor each time until you can lift it all the way up to your waist and stand upright.
- Repeat the sequence, but when you pick up your dog’s bowl, walk over to a table or counter with it. Then put a special treat into the bowl, walk back to your dog and return the bowl to the same place on the floor.

Stage Seven: Making It Work for Everyone

- The last stage is to have all adult family members go through stages one through six. Each person needs to start at the beginning and progress through the steps the same way, always making sure that your dog continues to look relaxed and comfortable during exercises. Don’t assume that because your dog is okay with one person approaching the bowl, they’ll automatically be comfortable with another person doing the same thing. They have to learn that the rules work the same way with everyone.
- The entire treatment program above is gradual enough to help your dog relax and anticipate the special treats rather than feel threatened and become aggressive when people approach them while they’re eating. Through the exercises, your dog will learn that people approaching the food bowl bring even tastier food—they’re not coming to take any food away.

Treatment Troubleshooting and Tips

- If you can't feed your dog kibble for some reason, just make sure that the treats you offer by hand during exercises are more desirable to your dog than the food in the bowl.
- If you can feed your dog kibble but prefer they eat something else instead—such as a raw diet, homemade food or canned food—do all the exercises with kibble first but then go through the steps again using the more exciting food in your dog's bowl. Again, just make sure what you offer by hand during exercises is still better than what your dog already has in the bowl.
- If your dog eats so quickly that you have few opportunities to offer better food during treatment exercises, buy a commercially available dish designed to slow down their eating. For example, try using the Brake-Fast® Bowl, the DogPause® Dog Bowl or the Eat Better™ Dog Bowl.
- Read: Mine! A Guide to Resource Guarding in Dogs by Jean Donaldson (2002), published by Kinship Communications/SFSPCA, is an excellent short book that offers more information about food guarding. You can find it online at www.dogwise.com or www.amazon.com.

Managing Your Dog's Behavior

Apart from your treatment sessions, you need to manage your dog's behavior carefully to avoid aggressive encounters. Do not allow others to go near your dog while they're eating. If they guard food from children in the family, DO NOT attempt these exercises with any child under 18 years of age. Instead, seek help from a Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist (CAAB or ACAAB), a board-certified veterinary behaviorist (Dip ACVB), or a Certified Professional Dog Trainers (CPDT) with education and experience treating aggression.

If your dog guards food from visitors to your home, it might be easier to manage the behavior than resolve it. If your dog and guests are in the same room, just remove all food items from the area. Alternatively, you can keep your dog confined in a separate area of your home while guests visit. Be aware that dogs sometimes guard food intended for people, even if the food is situated on a table or countertop. If food is going to be present when guests visit, you'll want to confine your dog to ensure everyone's safety.

What NOT to Do

- Do not punish or intimidate your dog when they guard food. Remember that when a person approaches a food-guarding dog, the dog will react as though the person intends to take the food away. This makes sense because dogs naturally compete for food. Some people insist that "dominating" your dog and showing that you're stronger and able to take away the food will make them stop guarding it. On the contrary, doing so is dangerous and unnecessary. It can sometimes cause resource guarding to get worse, and it can damage your relationship with your dog. It's easier and safer to simply change the way your dog feels about people approaching when they have food through desensitization and counterconditioning.

First and foremost, we recommend that all pet owners consult with their veterinarian. The information contained herein is meant to be a resource. It is not exhaustive, nor does it indicate an endorsement of recommendation from Greenville County Animal Care. Please use your own due diligence in researching these sources and making the best choice for your pet(s).

We'd like to give thanks and credit to the following organizations, whose published resources were utilized in addition to staff research for this compilation:

Paws Like Me
www.pawslkeme.com
Richmond SPCA
www.richmondspca.org
Nevada Humane Society
www.nevadahumanesociety.org ASPCA
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