

Behavior Solutions: Problem Prevention

Bringing home a new puppy or dog is an exciting time and you want everything to be just right. You've checked all the items off your doggie to-do list: find a vet, nutritious food, fun toys, comfy bed, and you feel like you have everything ready for him to come home. All is well until you discover that your new best friend has decided to do some landscaping of his own in your yard or has mistaken your laundry basket for his personal toy chest. Dogs left to their own devices to learn the rules of the household will not get it right unless they get some help from you.

Reasons for Problem Prevention

Problem prevention means thwarting unwanted behaviors before they start. From the time you first bring your dog home you must teach him the rules of the house and stay consistent with them. Dogs begin learning very early on from their mother, littermates, environment, and the people around them. Eight to twenty weeks of age is known as the imprinting stage and it is during this time that, through positive training and experiences, many problems and fears can be averted. If you don't clearly demonstrate what is and is not acceptable to your dog, he will learn behaviors on his own that more than likely won't be the ones you want.

Preventing unwanted behaviors, such as destructive chewing and digging or nuisance barking, from ever getting started is a much easier task than reforming an established habit. Once your dog begins partaking in these activities he is already being reinforced through the act itself and the attention he receives from you. It may even turn into a

game, as in cases when he sees how excited you get when he steals socks from the laundry. It takes less time on your part to prevent a bad habit from starting than it takes him to form the habit.

The Canine Cranium

Prevention is based on classical and operant conditioning: your dog will continue doing those things that are in his best interest and have a pleasurable outcome. For example, when your dog sits, praise and reward him with a small treat. The more you practice this the more your dog will offer this behavior on his own because it results in something favorable for him. Show your dog what you want of him and positively reinforce only those behaviors. Conversely, your dog will stop doing those things that are not in any way reinforced or that result in something unpleasant, like a strong verbal “No!” when you catch him playing tug-of-war with your drapes. Whether positively reinforcing good behaviors or trying to put an end a bad one, consistency and patience are a must to avoid confusion.

Dogs will be Dogs

A dog is a dog and they still retain innate drives towards behaviors that are not always favored by us. Chewing, digging, and barking are normal canine behaviors, but owning a dog does not mean your house and yard has to look and sound like they have gone to the dogs. (Please refer to Starmark’s Behavior Solutions: Chewing, Digging, and/or Barking for advice on how to solve each of these topics.) Since your dog does not know what is expected of him, he must be clearly shown the rules.

Starmark Animal Behavior Center

Before you even bring your new puppy or dog home, prepare by dog-proofing every area of the home your dog will have access to. Generally, if there is something of value that you do not want chewed or knocked over, keep it out of your dog's reach. Move plants, pick up remote controls, cover the trash, wrap wires and cords, and close the doors of rooms you don't want him exploring.

Begin obedience training with lots of positive reinforcement as soon as your dog comes home to establish an effective line of communication with him and to keep him active. The Pro-Training Clicker™ is a fast and fun way to teach your dog obedience commands. Clicking and rewarding the instant your dog does something right will allow him to associate his action with the reward. With practice, this association will make good behaviors more likely to recur. Refer to the complete Pro-Training Clicker™ guide on www.starmarkacademy.com for step-by-step instructions on many obedience exercises.

Several problem behaviors arise out of boredom. Keep your dog stimulated by providing him with activities that appeal to his natural predatory canine inclinations. Get a sandbox for your dog as an acceptable place to dig instead of your garden. You can even bury bones or toys in the sand to give him something to hunt for. Try feeding your dog his meals out of Starmark's Everlasting Treat Ball™ in place of a bowl. The Everlasting Treat Ball's™ unique shape makes it wobble and roll on its own and your dog will have to figure out how to expel the food inside. Once your dog is used to working for his food, increase the challenge by hiding the Everlasting Treat Ball™ around your home so he really will have to hunt for his food like his ancestors did. This helps keep your dog's

mind active with no need to seek stimulation elsewhere. (For more information on keeping your dog active, please refer to Starmark's Behavior Solutions: Hyperactivity.)

Frightened Fido?

An unpleasant experience can trigger apprehension and stubborn lifelong fears in your dog. This is especially true in puppies and young dogs. Expose your puppy to as many different people, situations, and places as possible in a calm and positive way. Take him to the vet's office or to the groomer *without* receiving treatment and allow the staff to give him a treat so he gets used to being there. Allow children to calmly approach your puppy and give him treats, along with people in uniform or large hats. Puppy socialization classes or group obedience classes are a good way to introduce your puppy to new people in a fun environment. A fear of loud noises, such as thunder, is common in many dogs. Show your dog that there is nothing to be afraid of by staying calm and going about your normal routine during storms. When your dog shows signs of fear, like whimpering, trembling, or cowering, do not coddle him by telling him it's ok in a soft, soothing voice or hold him. This will only show him that this is a means of getting your attention and reinforces the fear.

Perfect Pooches

Of the many wonderful things dogs bring to our lives, bad habits don't have to be part of the package. At Starmark we believe that a well-behaved and well-trained dog is a happy dog and a better companion. Using our training techniques, which emphasize consistency and patience, you can have a dog whose only habit is being your best friend and an enjoyable family member.

Trainer Developed: Academy Tested

The certified training and behavior specialists at Starmark Academy created this behavior solutions guide with you and your dog's needs in mind. Products mentioned in this guide are available at PetSmart, Petco, and other pet supply retailers, as well as online at our web site: www.dogtrainingandboardingaustin.com. All products, guides and videos are tested and approved by the training directors of Starmark Academy, our accredited school for professional dog trainers. It is the hands-on experience of our training division, combined with the vast technical knowledge and experience of the Starmark Academy staff that allows us to bring you useful and unique dog training and behavior solutions. We train dogs just like yours every day; we work with pet enthusiasts just like you every day. Thank you for choosing Starmark, the world leader in pet education.

For additional pet solutions and information about our products, please visit Starmark online at our Web sites: www.dogtrainingandboardingaustin.com; www.schoolfordogtrainers.com; and www.aboutdogtraining.com.

Copyright 2013, Starmark Pet Products, Inc.

Starmark Animal Behavior Center