

Starmark Animal Behavior Center, Inc.

Behavior Solutions: Stealing

A thief is on the loose right now and was last seen in your home. While a call to the police isn't necessary, obedience training might be. Some dogs can be notorious thieves of everything from clothing to food, and just about anything else they can fit in their mouths and make a getaway with. Though sometimes an entertaining habit when he absconds with bunny slippers, it can also be an annoyance and even dangerous. With the help of some practical training advice from Starmark Animal Behavior Center, your dog can become a reformed criminal instead of a lifetime offender.

Why Dogs Steal

Dogs steal to further investigate new things that strike their curiosity or because the object seems like it would be fun to play with. Stealing can also be rewarding for your dog, as in the case of the two pounds of Whoop™ burgers last seen on the kitchen counter. It is often inadvertently reinforced by owners who go in hot pursuit of their dog trying to retrieve the stolen item. Since dogs are almost always up for a game of chase, they may deliberately steal to instigate play. Dogs that have been picked up as strays off city streets are typically used to fending for themselves to find food where ever they can, so their stealing habit may be more ingrained and harder to break. Also, dogs do not know the rules of the house until you teach them, so training is necessary to keep them out of trouble.

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Securing the Crime Scene

Prevention is one of the most effective ways to keep bad habits from forming in your dog. Dog-proof your home to keep your dog from stealing things you don't want him to have: shut doors, close cabinets, cover trash cans, don't leave food out, and most of all, don't leave things lying around your house. Set up baby-gates to block off the areas of your home you don't want your dog to have access to. For more information refer to Starmark's "Behavior Solutions: Dog Proofing" on www.dogtrainingandboardingaustin.com.

Dogs left to their own devices will get themselves into trouble. For times when you are unable to supervise your dog, confine him to a crate or dog-proofed room of your home. The crate should be large enough to allow your dog to stand up, turn around, and lie down. Keep your dog comfortable and happy in the crate or dog-proofed area by providing him with a bed and interactive toys. For advice on how to crate train your dog, refer to Starmark's "Behavior Solutions: Crate Training" on www.dogtrainingandboardingaustin.com.

Reforming Your Canine Criminal

Obedience training is the most effective ways to communicate with your dog and clearly demonstrate desired behaviors. The Pro-Training Clicker™ can help you quickly and easily teach your dog such practical behaviors as coming back to you when called, giving stolen items back, and even ignore tempting items. "Come Back When Called" is one of the most important commands to teach your dog for his safety. Your dog can learn that coming back to you is a good thing with some treats, a clicker, and a six-foot leash. With

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your dog on leash in a secure area, wait for him to become distracted, and then hold a treat slightly in front of his nose. When he shows interest in the treat, back away with your treat hand close to your body and say “Come.” Your dog will want to follow you and his treat. Click and reward him when he reaches you. Never punish your dog for coming to you- this will make him apprehensive to come to you when you call. For a complete Starmark Pro-Training Clicker™ guide and streaming video lessons on this exercise and others, visit www.starmarkacademy.com.

The “Give” command can also be important in case your dog gets a hold of something that could harm him. This can be taught with a clicker, some treats, and one of your dog’s toys, but not his favorite toy to start off in case he is not willing to give that one up even for food. Give your dog his toy, and then hold a treat slightly in front him. Since he will not be able to hold onto his toy and eat the treat at the same time, he will drop the toy. When he drops it, say “Give” and click and reward him with the treat. The command is given after he drops the toy so he will better understand what it means. With practice he will give you what he has when you say, “Give.”

The “Leave It” command can come in handy when you want your dog to ignore something that would ordinarily interest him. With a clicker, some treats, and your dog on leash, drop some food on the ground and tell him, “Leave it,” making sure he is not able to reach what you have dropped. When he stops going for the dropped food, click and reward him with a treat from your hand. Make sure he is not able to get to the dropped food or it will counteract what you are trying to teach him.

Foiled Again

Setting up pet-friendly traps can also help teach your dog not to steal. Leave something on the counter that will entice your dog surrounded by double-sided tape. When your dog jumps on the counter to see the tempting item, his paws will stick to the tape. Your dog will easily be able to free his paws, but the experience itself is usually unpleasant enough to deter most dogs from doing it after a couple of tries with the same outcome. You can also leave a can filled with pennies or pebbles near an item that your dog shouldn't have, but that interests him anyway. When your dog goes for a closer look or to take it, he will knock over the can, creating a loud, startling noise. Again, this in itself will usually be enough to deter him after a few times. Keep a squirt gun with you in the house. When you see your dog going for something you don't want him to have, give him a squirt. The water is non-directional, so your dog will not associate it with you, and it will distract him away from the item long enough for you to redirect his attention to something more dog appropriate.

Thick as Thieves

Your home doesn't have to be a harbor for a canine criminal. At Starmark we believe that a well-behaved and well-trained dog is a happy dog and a better companion. Each dog is unique, and so is his owner. That's why we use a variety of techniques, customizing your dog's training experience to suit his personality and your individual needs. Using our training techniques, which emphasize consistency and patience, you and your dog can be thick as thieves without having to steal a thing.

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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 online at our Web sites: www.dogtrainingandboardingaustin.com; www.schoolfordogtrainers.com; and www.aboutdogtraining.com.

Starmark Trainer's Recommended Equipment:

Pro-Training Clicker™- A fun and easy way to teach your dog obedience commands.

It's like saying "Well done," on time, every time your dog does something you like.

You'll have your dog trained faster than a thief in the night.

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