

ASK THE DOG SHRINK / KATHY SANTO

Bad manners and bad habits you didn't know you were teaching... **den and pack instincts**...

Q My dog is so hyper when guests come over that I have to put him in the yard. But he keeps scratching the door to get back in!

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DOGS ARE BORN ACTING like, well, *dogs*. Sometimes their canine instincts cause them to act in ways that we find offensive; and sometimes their actions are inadvertently taught and reinforced by their human family. Squealing “Where’s my puppy?” every time you walk in the front door will almost always yield a dog who is hyper any time the front door opens. And why not? He’s learned that there’s a party on the other side just for him. You have to teach your dog appropriate ways of greeting your guests, followed by teaching him how to behave while they’re in the house. A “sit and wait” and a “go to your bed” command will serve all of you well. The bottom line is that training your dog, instead of banishing him, is a better choice.

Our 18-month-old dog is digging up our sprinkler heads. When he was a puppy we would turn them on to watch him bite at the water sprays—when they popped back into the ground he would pounce and paw at them. It was hysterically funny. But now he’s progressed to digging them up. What should we do?

I think you should go sit in the corner and write “I will never intentionally condition my puppy to do something destructive” 100 times, and then we’ll talk. Tell me, please, that you or someone watching that scene said, “Do we really want to teach him that this is a good thing to do?” How do you feel about hand-watering your lawn? I’m serious. The fastest way to extinguish a behavior is to no longer allow the dog to engage in it. You can either keep your dog in the house when you run the sprinklers or allow him to be outside with you while you water with a hose. If he leaps and bites at the hose, put him back inside. Next, supervise him any time he’s outside so that if he attempts to dig at the sprinkler you can correct him with a verbal “Ah ah” and redirect him to a toy that you want him to play with. Let this be a warning—what’s entertaining today could become a bad habit tomorrow.



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My dog has a big bed in the kitchen. Instead of using it, she lies under the glass-top coffee table when we watch TV or under the desk when I work. The table is full of fur and nose prints and my legs cramp up because there’s no place to put them. How can I make her love her bed?

Your dog is giving you lessons in Canine Behavior 101. First lesson: most dogs retain a den instinct from their ancestors. Simply put, it means that they derive comfort and security from being in a place that approximates a den. A big dog bed in the middle of the kitchen doesn’t meet that criterion. A close fitting, cavelike location does, hence her preference for the coffee table and computer desk. She also wants your companionship, which is your second lesson—dogs want to be with their pack. Consider buying her two inexpensive airline crates; remove the doors, put in soft blankets, and place them in the rooms that she prefers. You’ll meet both her needs at the same time—to be in an enclosed area and to be with you and the family. ●