

PET BEHAVIOR AND TRAINING SERVICES, INC.

THE UNRULY ADOLESCENT DOG

Have you ever said this? “He knows it’s wrong but he does it anyway.” Many dogs seem to reach a stage around six to eighteen months of age that is equivalent to the human at age thirteen to sixteen years. It is a period of time that can be very difficult to cope with, and one, which the dog unlike the human doesn’t necessarily grow out of adolescence. This behavior can have a learning effect on the dog that can become well established.

The main difficulty regarding the unruly dog is that there are generally so many problems occurring at the same time that the owner feels overwhelmed. The following suggestions will provide you with some immediate relief while also providing long term benefits.

Limit Opportunity for Mistakes

For the dog that jumps on counter tops, unrolls the paper in the bathroom, eats ballpoint pens, chews up the mail, digs in the yard, turns the hose in the yard to small rubber pieces ---- supervise and prevent. Do not allow this type of dog free run inside or outside the house. Keep the dog in one or two rooms (where the family usually is most of the time) with supervision. Pick up as many household items as possible in this area (dog proof). Go outside with the dog when he needs to eliminate and to exercise. Crate the dog whenever you must be gone, asleep, or cannot supervise. (See Crate Training handout).

Owners who yell “No”, “Stop it”, point, stomp their feet, swat at the dog, usually do it out of frustration and in the hope that the dog will eventually obey them. The opposite is usually true. The dog becomes de-sensitized and doesn’t respond at all, or worse gets even more excitable.

Sometimes the easiest and best way is to avoid the problem in the first place. Supervise and prevent. Remember practice makes perfect but only if the dog gets perfect practice.

Eliminate Reasons

If you don’t want the dog running in the family room, games of fetch should be played only outside or in the basement. Provide structured walks, play times and play places. The dog will quickly learn the schedule of the day. Remember to give the young dog several hard play periods a day. A tired dog is a better-behaved dog.

All rough games, such as wrestling, should be stopped so the dog can learn to play quietly, without mouthing, jumping, or climbing all over the owner. Over zealous, or even too much petting can exaggerate mouthy behavior. Individual dogs have different thresholds of the length and intensity of petting they can tolerate.

Separate the young dog from children during unsupervised time. Parents should set aside specific times when they are able to supervise both. Teach children how to play fetch, hide and seek, parlor tricks, or simple obedience so that they can interact with the dog in a positive manner.

Getting into the trash or jumping on counters for food are too much temptation for most dogs. Simply put the trash and food away.

It is easier for the dog not to confuse his toys with household items if you limit the number of textures he has to chew on, not the number of toys, but the types. We recommend nylon bones, sterilized bones and treat-release toys. Premier and Kong brands have many attractive treat-release toys that you can stuff when you want to keep your dog occupied and content. Sterilized bones with holes in the ends can be stuffed with a little peanut butter or soft dog treats. These types of toys will go a long way in preventing boredom and can help your dog develop a preference for chew toys you select. Be sure to supervise your dog with any toy.

Reinforcement

It is important to recognize that any attention to a behavior, even negative attention is rewarding to the dog. Chasing him when he grabs something, pushing him off when he jumps, yelling when he chews, are all forms of attention and are rewarding for many dogs.

Obedience Training

Obedience classes will help you learn how to communicate without yelling and help the dog learn to recognize and respond to what you want him to do. For example, sit instead of jump on you, lie down instead of getting all over Aunt Millie. If the dog has a way to get positive reinforcement, he may find less reason to think of ways to get negative reinforcement.

Sit for Everything

Once your dog is sitting reliably for you in training, it will be very important to get him into the habit of sitting as part of his interactions with people. Have him “Sit” before you pet him, before you let him in or out of the house, before feeding, before absolutely everything. A sitting dog cannot lunge out of the door, knock food out of your hand, or jump on you.

If you need more help or information, you may call Pet Behavior at 937-293-5686 or talk with your veterinarian.

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A non-profit organization specializing in the behavior of pets