

THE CANINE BEHAVIOR SERIES

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Submissive Urination

Some puppies and dogs will urinate when they are frightened, insecure, or even when you greet them, pet them, or pick them up. This is not really a housebreaking problem. It is called submissive urination and it's very important not to punish them or scold them for this behavior; such approaches will only make the problem worse.

You must make your interactions with the dog or puppy positive, EVEN THE INTERACTIONS WHERE YOU NEED TO CORRECT BAD BEHAVIOR. This goes against our human thinking, so it's hard to learn. But once you learn it, you will be so much better at training submissive dogs and puppies.

First, you need to intervene to stop a puppy from an unacceptable behavior in a FLASH of time. Your action should be timed at the correct instant to catch the puppy either in that behavior or just about to do it, and it is OVER, instantly. Many trainers use a sound, such as "Aaaa!" Avoid using "No!" for this, because we tend to use that so much that our dogs stop hearing it.

What then? Then comes something even MORE important: You SWITCH the puppy to a GOOD behavior, and you praise. Praise will work best in a young pup if there is more to it than words. Young pups haven't yet learned the true meaning of praise, and even petting hasn't developed its real meaning for them yet. So, with/after your praise, include a tiny treat or a fun game, or something else you know the puppy wants/wants to do at that moment. By always putting the praise just before or with the other reward, the praise will take on a powerful positive meaning for your dog over time.

What this does is condition your puppy that even a correction from you is an opportunity to do something good and fun and to earn "prizes"! You become an exciting leader, respected but not feared. The submissive stuff is made worse by rebuke for it, by lingering over it, and by making greetings too intense. Remember that for your puppy, even you letting the pup out of its crate in the morning is a greeting.

The submissive urination is almost involuntary on the part of the pup, a reflex to "turn off" the dominance/aggression of higher ranking pack members. People who behave in a dominant manner toward the pup are going to make this problem worse. Be a loving leader instead of an alpha, and you should do great with this pupster.

When you greet the pup (and when anyone else does), do not make eye contact or bend down at first. It's ideal if you can just keep walking and take pup straight outside without stopping, while you might speak in a calm voice to the dog, nothing too exciting. Once the pup has relieved the bladder outdoors, a calm greeting is in order. You want to teach the pup to greet people calmly anyway, since that helps to avoid the problem of separation anxiety (a dog that frantically tears up the house when you're gone) and makes for a more polite dog who can be with you more.

Squatting down or sitting down to greet the pup can help, but the main thing is that the pup is not jumping up on the person. Even if it's a small pup, that's not really safe either for the pup or the people, as it matures. Also try redirecting the greeting very quickly into a game of fetch the ball. That switches the dog out of the pack mode where submissive urination is more likely to happen, into a prey/play mode. Retrieving is a healthy game that directs a dog into good attitudes toward humans. Make sure everyone throws the toy in such a way that the dog is never jumping up and landing on just the hind legs. That can cause injuries in dogs--in spite of the fact that they do it on TV!

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