



Congratulations on the adoption of your new pet from the Los Alamos County Animal Shelter!

Friends of the Shelter (FOS) would like to take this opportunity to make you aware of services that FOS offers to adopters.

Spay/neutering – for information about our low-cost spay/neuter program and names of participating vets, contact Wendee at 660-1648 or Sally at 662-2773.

Behavioral counseling – if your pet has problem behaviors that you would like help correcting, please contact us as follows:

Cats (e.g., litterbox issues, getting along with other cats) –Diann, 662-2655, or Mary, 672-9276.

Dogs (e.g., dog aggression, barking, fence jumping, chewing/digging) Wendee, 660-1648, Sally, 662-2773, or Judi, 672-9432.

Dog obedience training – contact LADOC at 490-0639 (discount for shelter dogs)

Thanks again for adopting a shelter pet!



Your new pet has been fed Hill's Science Diet during his/her stay at the Los Alamos County Animal Shelter. Hill's Science Diet is a high-quality pet food that makes the following commitments to you, the pet owner.

**Safety First** — Our rigorous safety procedures are the foundation for your pet's well-being.

**The Best Nutrition** — Precisely balanced nutrition through continuous research and innovation to meet the specific needs of your pet.

**Great Taste** — The delicious taste pets love, in the varieties of flavors you like.

Friends of the Shelter has developed this flyer and this adoption packet to help you and your new pet settle in together. We remind you that abrupt changes in your pet's diet can lead to digestive upsets, and that is why we have included a sample of Hill's Science Diet, the food your pet was eating at the shelter.

Whatever pet food you ultimately choose to feed your pet, we recommend that you choose a premium quality pet food that is nutritionally balanced and appropriate for your pet's age, size, and weight.

Friends of the Shelter thanks you for adopting your new pet from the Los Alamos County Animal Shelter!



BEHAVIOR  
SERIES

# Introducing Your New Dog to Your Resident Dog

**F**ROM “THE LEADER OF THE PACK” to “the top dog,” plenty of simplistic metaphors come from the canine world. But relationships between canines can be pretty complex, beginning with the very first meeting. Like most animals who live in groups, dogs establish their own social structure, sometimes called a dominance hierarchy. This dominance hierarchy serves to maintain order, reduce conflict, and promote cooperation among pack members. Dogs also establish territories, which they may defend against intruders or rivals. Obviously, dogs’ social and territorial nature affects their behavior whenever a new dog is introduced to the household.

## Introduction Techniques

### Choose a Neutral Location

Introduce the dogs in a neutral location so that your resident dog is less likely to view the newcomer as a territorial intruder. Each dog should be handled by a separate person. With both dogs on leashes, begin the introductions in an area unfamiliar to each, such as a park or a neighbor’s yard. If you frequently walk your resident dog in a nearby park, she may view that area as her territory, too, so choose a less familiar site. If you are adopting your dog from an animal shelter, you might even bring your resident dog to the local shelter and introduce the two there.

### Use Positive Reinforcement

From the first meeting, help both dogs experience “good things” when they’re in each other’s presence. Let them sniff each other briefly, which is normal canine greeting behavior. As they do, talk to them in a happy, friendly tone of voice; never use a threatening tone. (Don’t allow them to investigate and sniff each other for too long, however, as this may escalate to an aggressive response.) After a

short time, get the attention of both dogs and give each a treat in return for obeying a simple command, such as “sit” or “stay.” Take the dogs for a walk and let them sniff and investigate each other at intervals. Continue with the “happy talk,” food rewards, and simple commands.

### Be Aware of Body Postures

One body posture that indicates things are going well is a “play-bow.” One dog will crouch with her front legs on the ground and her hind end in the air. This is an invitation to play, and a posture that usually elicits friendly behavior from the other dog. Watch carefully for body postures that indicate an aggressive response, including hair standing up on one dog’s back, teeth baring, deep growls, a stiff-legged gait, or a prolonged stare. If you see such postures, interrupt the interaction immediately by calmly getting each dog interested in something else. For example, both handlers can call their dogs to them, have them sit or lie down, and reward each with a treat. The dogs’ interest in the treats should prevent the situation from escalating into aggression. Try letting the dogs interact again, but this time for a shorter time period and/or at a greater distance from each other.

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## Take the Dogs Home

When the dogs seem to be tolerating each other's presence without fearful or aggressive responses and the investigative greeting behaviors have tapered off, you can take them home. Whether you choose to take them in the same vehicle will depend on their size, how well they ride in the car, how trouble-free the initial introduction has been, and how many dogs are involved.

## Space Your Introductions

If you have more than one resident dog in your household, it may be best to introduce the resident dogs to the new dog one at a time. Two or more resident dogs may have a tendency to gang up on the newcomer.

## Support the Top Dog

It is important to support the dominant dog in your household, even if that turns out to be the newcomer. This may mean, for example, allowing the dominant dog to claim a favored sleeping spot as his or to have access to a desirable toy. Trying to impose your preference for which dog should be dominant can confuse the dogs and create further problems.

## Introducing Puppies to Adult Dogs

Puppies usually pester adult dogs unmercifully. Before the age of four months, puppies may not recognize subtle body postures from adult dogs signaling that they've had enough. Well-socialized adult dogs with good temperaments may set limits with puppies with a warning growl or snarl. These behaviors are normal and should be allowed. Adult dogs who aren't well socialized, or who have a history of fighting with other dogs, may attempt to set limits with more aggressive behaviors, such as biting, which could harm the puppy. For this reason, a puppy shouldn't be left alone with an adult dog until you're confident the puppy isn't in any danger. Be sure to give the adult dog some quiet time away from the puppy and some extra individual attention as well.

## When to Get Help

If the introductions don't go smoothly, contact a professional animal behaviorist immediately. Dogs can be severely injured in fights, and the longer the problem continues, the harder it can be to resolve. Punishment won't work and could make things worse. Fortunately, most conflicts between dogs in the same family can be resolved with professional guidance.

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# Crate Training Your Dog

## BEHAVIOR SERIES

**I F YOU LIKE NOTHING BETTER** than coming home from a hard day's work and finding that your dog decided to "go" on the couch or use your favorite slippers as a new chew toy, then crate training isn't for you. But if you're like most people, then using a crate to properly train your dog will be time well spent.

Crate training takes some time and effort, but it is a proven way to help train dogs who act inappropriately without knowing any better. If you have a new dog or puppy, you can use the crate to limit his access to the house until he learns all the house rules—like what he can and can't chew on and where he can and can't eliminate. A crate is also a safe way of transporting your dog in the car or taking him places where he may not be welcome to run freely. If you properly train your dog to use the crate, he'll think of it as his safe place and will be happy to spend time there when needed.

### Selecting a Crate

Crates may be plastic (often called "flight kennels") or collapsible, metal pens. They come in different sizes and can be purchased at most pet supply stores. Your dog's crate should be just large enough for him to stand up and turn around in. If your dog is still growing, choose a crate that will accommodate his adult size. Block off the excess crate space so your dog can't eliminate at one end and retreat to the other.

### The Crate Training Process

Crate training can take days or weeks, depending on your dog's age, temperament, and past experiences. It's important to keep two things in mind while crate training: The crate should always be associated with something pleasant, and training should take place in a series of small steps. Don't go too fast.

#### **Step 1: Introducing Your Dog to the Crate**

- Place the crate in an area of your house where the family spends a lot of time, such as the family room. Put a soft blanket or towel in the crate. Bring your dog over to the

crate and talk to him in a happy tone of voice. Make sure the crate door is open and secured so that it won't hit your dog and frighten him.

- To encourage your dog to enter the crate, drop some small food treats nearby, then just inside the door, and finally, all the way inside the crate. If he refuses to go all the way in at first, that's okay; don't force him to enter. Continue tossing treats into the crate until your dog will walk calmly all the way into the crate to get the food. If he isn't interested in treats, try tossing a favorite toy in the crate. This step may take a few minutes or as long as several days.

#### **Step 2: Feeding Your Dog His Meals in the Crate**

- After introducing your dog to the crate, begin feeding him his regular meals near it. This will create a pleasant association with the crate. If your dog is readily entering the crate when you begin Step 2, place the food dish all the way at the back of the crate. If your dog remains reluctant to enter the crate, put the dish only as far inside as he will readily go without becoming fearful or anxious. Each time you feed him, place the dish a little further back in the crate.
- Once your dog is standing comfortably in the crate to eat his meal, you can close the door while he's eating. The first time you do this, open the door as soon as he finishes his meal. With each successive feeding, leave the door closed a few minutes longer, until he's staying in the crate for 10 minutes or so after eating. If he begins to whine to be let out, you may have increased the length of time too quickly. Next time, try leaving him in the crate for a shorter time period. If he does whine or cry in the crate, it's imperative that you not let him out until he stops. Otherwise, he'll learn that the way to get out of the crate is to whine, so he'll keep doing it.

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### **Step 3: Conditioning Your Dog to the Crate for Longer Time Periods**

- After your dog is eating his regular meals in the crate with no sign of fear or anxiety, you can confine him there for short time periods while you're home. Call him over to the crate and give him a treat. Give him a command to enter, such as "kennel." Encourage him by pointing to the inside of the crate with a treat in your hand. After your dog enters the crate, praise him, give him the treat, and close the door. Sit quietly near the crate for five to 10 minutes and then go into another room for a few minutes. Return, sit quietly again for a short time, then let him out of the crate.
- Repeat this process several times a day. With each repetition, gradually increase the length of time you leave him in the crate and the length of time you're out of his sight. Once your dog will stay quietly in the crate for about 30 minutes with you out of sight the majority of the time, you can begin leaving him crated when you're gone for short time periods or letting him sleep there at night. This may take several days or several weeks.

### **Step 4, Part A: Crating Your Dog When Left Alone**

- After your dog can spend about 30 minutes in the crate without becoming anxious or afraid, you can begin leaving him crated for short periods when you leave the house. Put him in the crate using your regular command and a treat. You might also want to leave him with a few safe toys in the crate. You'll want to vary at what point in your "getting ready to leave" routine you put your dog in the crate. Although he shouldn't be crated for a long time before you leave, you can crate him anywhere from five to 20 minutes prior to leaving.
- Don't make your departures emotional and prolonged but matter-of-fact. Praise your dog briefly, give him a treat for entering the crate, and then leave quietly. When you return home, don't reward your dog for excited behavior by responding to him in an excited, enthusiastic way. Keep arrivals low-key to avoid increasing his anxiety. Continue to crate your dog for short periods from time to time when you're home so he doesn't associate crating with being left alone.

### **Step 4, Part B: Crating Your Dog at Night**

- Put your dog in the crate using your regular command and a treat. Initially, it may be a good idea to put the crate in your bedroom or nearby in a hallway, especially if you have a puppy. Puppies often need to go outside to eliminate during the night, and you'll want to be able to hear your puppy when he whines to be let outside.

### **Related topics at [www.petsforlife.org](http://www.petsforlife.org)**

- Dog Toys and How to Use Them
- Reducing Separation Anxiety in Dogs

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- Older dogs, too, should initially be kept nearby so that they don't associate the crate with social isolation. Once your dog is sleeping comfortably through the night with his crate near you, you can begin to gradually move it to the location you prefer, although time spent with your dog—even sleep time—is a chance to strengthen the bond between you and your pet.

### **Potential Problems**

#### **Too Much Time in the Crate**

A crate isn't a magical solution. If not used correctly, a dog can feel trapped and frustrated. For example, if your dog is crated all day while you're at work and then crated again all night, he's spending too much time in too small a space. Other arrangements should be made to meet his physical and emotional needs. Also remember that puppies under six months of age shouldn't stay in a crate for more than three or four hours at a time. They can't control their bladders and bowels for longer periods.

#### **Whining**

If your dog whines or cries while in the crate at night, it may be difficult to determine whether he's whining to be let out of the crate or whether he needs to be let outside to eliminate. If you've followed the training procedures outlined above, then your dog hasn't been rewarded for whining in the past by being released from his crate. If that is the case, try to ignore the whining. If your dog is just testing you, he'll probably stop whining soon. Yelling at him or pounding on the crate will only make things worse.

If the whining continues after you've ignored him for several minutes, use the phrase he associates with going outside to eliminate. If he responds and becomes excited, take him outside. This should be a trip with a purpose, not playtime. If you're convinced that your dog doesn't need to eliminate, the best response is to ignore him until he stops whining. Don't give in; if you do, you'll teach your dog to whine loud and long to get what he wants. If you've progressed gradually through the training steps and haven't done too much too fast, you'll be less likely to encounter this problem. If the problem becomes unmanageable, you may need to start the crate training process over again.

#### **Separation Anxiety**

Attempting to use the crate as a remedy for separation anxiety won't solve the problem. A crate may prevent your dog from being destructive, but he may injure himself in an attempt to escape from the crate. Separation anxiety problems can only be resolved with counterconditioning and desensitization procedures. You may want to consult a professional animal-behavior specialist.

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BEHAVIOR  
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# Positive Reinforcement

## Training Your Dog (or Cat!) with Treats and Praise

**W**E ALL LIKE TO BE PRAISED rather than punished. The same is true for your pet, and that's the theory behind positive reinforcement. Positive reinforcement means giving your pet something pleasant or rewarding immediately after she does something you want her to do. Because your praise or reward makes her more likely to repeat that behavior in the future, it is one of your most powerful tools for shaping or changing your pet's behavior.

Correct timing is essential when using positive reinforcement. The reward must occur immediately—within seconds—or your pet may not associate it with the proper action. For example, if you have your dog “sit” but reward her after she’s already stood back up, she’ll think she’s being rewarded for standing up.

Consistency is also essential. Everyone in the family should use the same commands. It might help to post these where everyone can become familiar with them. The most commonly used commands for dogs are:

- “Sit”
- “Stay”
- “Down” (which means “lie down”)
- “Off” (which means “get off of me” or “get off the furniture”)
- “Stand”
- “Come”
- “Heel” (or “let’s go” or “with me”)
- “Leave it”
- “Settle”
- “Watch me”

Consistency means always rewarding the desired behavior and never rewarding undesired behavior.

### Using Positive Reinforcement

For your pet, positive reinforcement may include food treats, praise, petting, or a favorite toy or game. Food treats work especially well for training your dog. A treat should be enticing and irresistible to your pet. It should be a very small, soft piece of food, so that she will immediately gulp it down and look to you for more. If you give her something she has to chew or that breaks into bits and falls on the floor, she’ll be looking around the floor, not at you. Small pieces of soft commercial treats, hot dogs, cheese, or cooked chicken or beef have all proven successful. Experiment to see what works best for your pet. You can carry the treats in a pocket or fanny pack. Each time you use a food reward, you should couple it with a verbal reward (praise). Say something like, “Good dog,” in a positive, happy tone of voice.

Some pets may not be interested in food treats. For those pets, the reward could be in the form of a toy or brief play.

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When your pet is learning a new behavior, she should be rewarded every time she does the behavior, which means continuous reinforcement. It may be necessary to use a technique called “shaping” with your pet, which means reinforcing something close to the desired response and then gradually requiring more from your dog before she gets the treat. For example, if you’re teaching your dog to “shake hands,” you may initially reward her for lifting her paw off the ground, then for lifting it higher, then for touching your hand, then for letting you hold her paw, and finally, for actually “shaking hands” with you.

Intermittent reinforcement can be used once your pet has reliably learned the behavior. At first, reward her with the treat three out of every four times she does the behavior. Then, over time, reward her about half the time, then about a third of the time, and so on, until you’re only rewarding her occasionally with the treat. Continue to praise her every time—although once your dog has learned the behavior, your praise can be less effusive, such as a quiet, but positive, “Good dog.” Use a variable schedule of reinforcement so that she doesn’t catch on that she only has to respond every other time. Your pet will soon learn that if she keeps responding, eventually she’ll get what she wants—your praise and an occasional treat.

By understanding reinforcement, you’ll see that you’re not forever bound to carry a pocketful of goodies. Your dog will soon be working for your verbal praise, because she really does want to please you and knows that, occasionally, she’ll get a treat, too. There are many small opportunities to reinforce her behavior. You may have her “sit” before letting her out the door (which helps prevent door-darting), before petting her (which helps prevent jumping up on people), or before feeding her. Give her a pat or a “Good dog” for lying quietly by your feet, or slip a treat into a Kong®-type toy when she’s chewing it instead of your shoe.

## The Pros and Cons of Punishment

Punishment can be verbal, postural, or physical, and it means giving your pet something unpleasant immediately after she does something you don’t want her to do. The punishment makes it less likely that the behavior will occur again. To be

effective, punishment must be delivered while your pet is engaged in the undesirable behavior—in other words, “caught in the act.” If the punishment is delivered too late, even seconds later, your pet will not associate the punishment with the undesired behavior.

Punishment delivered by you may erode your dog’s trust. That’s why punishment is most effective when it does not come directly from you. For example, after your dog acts in an undesirable way, use a shake can, an air horn, or keys—but don’t draw attention to the fact that the noise comes from you. If your dog perceives her “environment,” instead of you, to be delivering the punishment, she’ll be more likely to avoid the behavior even when you’re not around.

In addition, if you’re too late in administering it, punishment will seem unpredictable to your dog. She’s likely to become fearful, distrustful, or aggressive, which will only lead to more behavior problems. What we humans often interpret as “guilty” looks are actually submissive postures by our pets. Animals don’t have a moral sense of right and wrong, but they are adept at associating your presence, and the presence of a mess, with punishment.

If you’ve tried punishment and it hasn’t worked, you should stop using punishment and use only positive reinforcement. And never use physical punishment that involves some level of discomfort or pain, which may cause your pet to bite to defend herself. Holding the neck skin and shaking your dog or performing “alpha rolls” (forcing your dog onto her back and pinning her on the floor) are both likely to result in bites. And punishment might be associated with other stimuli, including people, that are present at the time the punishment occurs. For example, a pet who is punished for getting too close to a small child may become fearful of, or aggressive toward, that child—or toward other children. That’s why physical punishment is not only bad for your pet, it’s also bad for you and others.

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## Related topics at [www.petsforlife.org](http://www.petsforlife.org)

- Nothing in Life Is Free: A Training Technique for Dogs
- Positive Reinforcement—Training Your Cat

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# Calming the Fearful Dog

## BEHAVIOR SERIES

**F**EAR COMES IN ALL SHAPES AND SIZES, especially for your furry, four-pawed friend. Whether in response to a stranger or startling noise, your dog may display certain body postures, including lowering his head, flattening his ears back against his head, and tucking his tail between his legs if he's scared.

A frightened dog may also pant, salivate, tremble, pace, or try to escape. He may show submissive behaviors—avoiding eye contact, urinating submissively, or rolling over to expose his belly—or he may freeze and remain immobile. Some dogs will bark or growl at the feared object. In extreme cases of fearfulness, a dog may be destructive (out of general anxiety or in an attempt to escape), or he may lose control of his bladder or bowels.

### Causes of Fearful Behavior

Determining why your dog is fearful is helpful but not always essential to treating the fearful behavior, although the reason for his fear will dictate the relative success of the treatment. A dog who is genetically predisposed to general fearfulness, or a dog who was improperly socialized during a critical stage in his development, will probably not respond as well to treatment as a dog who has developed a fear in response to a specific experience. It's essential, however, to first rule out any medical causes for your dog's fearful behavior. Your first step should be to take your dog to your veterinarian for a thorough medical evaluation.

### What You Can Do

Most fears won't go away by themselves and, if left untreated, may get worse. Some fears, when treated, will decrease in intensity or frequency but may not disappear entirely. After you've ruled out medical causes, your first

step in dealing with your dog's fearful behavior is to identify what triggers his fear. Is he afraid of startling noises? Is he afraid of being left alone? If your dog's fears are rooted in either of these scenarios, see our related tip sheets on these topics. Most fears can be treated using desensitization and counterconditioning techniques, which require time and patience. You may need help from a professional animal-behavior specialist with these techniques.

### How to Use the Desensitization Technique

- Begin by exposing your dog to a very low level or small amount of whatever is causing his fear. For example, if he is afraid of bicycles, start with a bicycle placed at a distance of 100 feet from your dog.
- Reward him for calm, nonfearful behavior in the presence of the bicycle. Gradually move the bicycle closer to him. As long as your dog remains relaxed, reward him with treats and praise. If at any point he becomes anxious, move the bicycle further away and proceed at a slower pace.
- When your dog can remain relaxed in the presence of a stationary bicycle, move the bicycle 100 feet away again, but have someone ride it slowly by him. Again, gradually increase the proximity of the slowly moving bicycle, rewarding your dog for remaining calm and relaxed. Repeat this procedure as many times as

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necessary, gradually increasing the speed of the moving bicycle.

- This process may take several days, weeks, or even months. You must proceed at a slow enough pace that your dog never becomes fearful during the desensitization process. If you move too quickly, you won't be successful.

### How to Use the Counterconditioning Technique

Counterconditioning works best when used in conjunction with desensitization and involves pairing the fear *stimulus* (for example, a moving bicycle) with an activity or behavior incompatible with the fear *behavior* (for example, the dog remaining in the "sit" position).

- Using the desensitization technique example described previously, while your dog is exposed to the bicycle, ask him to perform some obedience exercises, such as "sit" and "down." Reward him for obeying and continue to have him obey commands as the bicycle is moved closer to him.
- If your dog doesn't know any commands, teach him a few using treats and praise. Don't ever use punishment, collar corrections, or scolding to teach him the commands, as the point of counterconditioning is for him to associate pleasant things with the stimulus that now frightens him.

### Realistic Expectations

Some of the things that frighten dogs can be difficult to reproduce or control. For example, if your dog is afraid of thunderstorms, he may be responding to other things that occur during the storm, such as smells, barometric pressure changes, or changes in natural light. During the desensitization process, it is impossible for you to reproduce all of these factors. Another example would be if your dog is afraid of men. You may work at desensitizing him, but if a man lives in your household and your dog is constantly exposed to him, this can disrupt the gradual process of desensitization. You need to be patient with your dog and work hard not to become frustrated during the desensitization process.

### Related topics at [www.petsforlife.org](http://www.petsforlife.org)

- Helping Your Dog Overcome Fear of Thunder and Other Startling Noises
- Reducing Separation Anxiety in Dogs
- Understanding Aggressive Behavior in Dogs

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### When to Get Help

Because desensitization and counterconditioning can be difficult techniques to master, and because behavior problems may increase if these techniques are done incorrectly, you may want to get professional, in-home help from an animal-behavior specialist. Keep in mind that a fearful dog who feels trapped or is pushed too far may become aggressive. Some dogs will respond aggressively to whatever it is that frightens them. If your dog displays any aggressive behavior, such as growling, snarling, snapping, or baring his teeth, stop all behavior modification procedures and seek professional help from an animal-behavior specialist as soon as possible.

### Consult with Your Veterinarian

Medication may help reduce your dog's anxiety levels for short time periods. Your veterinarian is the only person who is qualified and licensed to prescribe medication for your dog. Don't attempt to give your dog any over-the-counter or prescription medication without consulting with your veterinarian. Animals don't respond to drugs the same way people do, and a medication that may be safe for humans could be fatal to your dog. Drug therapy alone won't reduce fears and phobias permanently, but in extreme cases, behavior modification and medication used together may be the best approach.

### What Not to Do

- Do not punish your dog for being afraid. Punishment will only make him more fearful.
- Do not try to force your dog to experience the object or situation that is causing him to be afraid. For example, if he is afraid of bicycles and you force him to stand in place while bicycles whiz by, he'll probably become more fearful of bicycles rather than less fearful.
- Never punish your dog after the fact for destruction or house soiling caused by anxiety or fear. Animals don't understand punishment after the fact, even if it's only seconds later. This kind of destruction or house soiling is the result of panic, not misbehavior. Punishment will do more harm than good.

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# Dealing with a Dominant Dog

**F**OR SOME PEOPLE, the phrase “top dog” isn’t just a saying. It actually describes their dogs. If you’ve got a dog who likes to boss you (or others) around, chances are you’ve got a dominance aggression problem in your household—a problem that could endanger you, your family, and others.

Most dogs assume a neutral or submissive role toward people, but some dogs will challenge their owners for dominance. A dominant dog may stare, bark, growl, snap, or even bite when you give him a command or ask him to give up a toy, treat, or resting place. Sometimes even hugging, petting, or grooming can be interpreted as gestures of dominance and, therefore, provoke a growl or snap—and this is true even though your dog may still be very affectionate and often solicit petting and attention from you.

To understand why your dog behaves in these ways, it’s important to know some things about canine social systems. Animals who live in social groups, including wolves and domestic dogs, establish a social structure called a dominance hierarchy within their group. This hierarchy serves to maintain order, reduce conflict, and promote cooperation among group members. A position within the dominance hierarchy is established by each member of the group, based on the outcomes of interactions between themselves and the other pack members. The more dominant animals can control access to valued items such as food, den sites, and mates. For domestic dogs, valued items might be food, toys, sleeping or resting places, and attention from their owners.

For your home to be a safe and happy place for pets and people, it’s best that the humans in the household assume the highest positions in the dominance hierarchy, particularly with dominant dogs.

## Is Your Dog Dominant?

You may have a dominance issue with your dog if he:

- Resists obeying well-known commands.
- Won’t move out of your way when required.
- Nudges your hand, mouths your arm, or insists on being petted or played with—in other words, he “orders” you to obey.
- Defends food, toys, or other objects from you.
- Growls or bares teeth under any circumstances.
- Resists handling by you, the veterinarian, or the groomer.
- Gets up on furniture without permission and won’t get down.
- Snaps at you.

## What to Do If You Recognize Signs of Dominance in Your Dog

If you recognize the beginning signs of dominance aggression in your dog, consult an animal-behavior specialist immediately. Avoid using any form of physical punishment on your dog. Getting physical with a dominant dog may cause the dog to intensify his aggression, posing the risk of injury to you.

If your dog has shown signs of dominance aggression, take the following precautions to ensure the safety of your family and others who may encounter your dog:

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- Avoid situations that bring out the aggressive behavior.
- Back off and use “happy talk” to relieve the intensity of situations in which your dog acts aggressively.
- Supervise, confine, or restrict your dog’s activities as necessary, especially when children or other pets are present.
- Use a head halter or muzzle to help control your dog when you’re outdoors. Brand names of head halters include Gentle Leader, Promise Collar, or Halti.
- When you’re indoors with your dog, control access to parts of the home by using baby gates or by crating your dog. You can also use a cage-type muzzle, head halter, or leash for control purposes—but do so only when you can closely supervise your dog.

Dominance aggression problems are unlikely to go away without your taking steps to resolve them. Because dominant-aggressive dogs can be potentially dangerous, treatment of dominance aggression problems should always be supervised by an animal-behavior specialist.

### Becoming the Leader of the Pack

Use the following techniques—none of which requires a physical confrontation with your dog—to help you gain some control over your dog and establish yourself as the “pack leader”:

- Spay or neuter your dog to reduce hormonal contributions to aggression. Understand that after a mature animal has been spayed or neutered, it may take time for those hormones to clear from the body. In some cases, long-standing behavior patterns may continue even after the hormones or other causes no longer exist.
- Use a training technique called “Nothing in Life Is Free” to establish your leadership in a safe, nonconfrontational way. This technique requires your dog to “work” for everything he gets from you. Have your dog obey at least one command (such as “sit”) before you pet him, give him dinner, put on his leash, or throw him a toy. If your dog doesn’t know any commands or doesn’t perform them reliably, you’ll first have to teach him, using positive reinforcement techniques, and practice with him daily.

### Related topics at [www.petsforlife.org](http://www.petsforlife.org)

- How to Use a Head Halter
- Nothing in Life Is Free: A Training Technique for Dogs
- Positive Reinforcement: Training Your Dog (or Cat!) with Treats and Praise

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(For complete guidance on this technique, see “Nothing in Life Is Free: A Training Technique for Dogs.”) You may need to seek professional help if, after two or three weeks of working on a command, your dog does not obey each time you ask.

- Don’t feed your dog food from the table and don’t allow begging.
- Don’t play “tug-of-war,” wrestle, or play roughly with your dog.
- Ignore barking and jumping up.
- Don’t allow your dog on the furniture or your bed unless invited to do so by you, because this is a privilege reserved for leaders. If your dog growls or snaps when you try to remove him from the furniture, use a treat to lure him off. Otherwise, try to limit his access to your bed or furniture by using baby gates or a crate or by closing doors.
- Always remember to reward appropriate behavior.
- Consult your veterinarian about acupuncture, massage therapy, or drug therapy. Your veterinarian may prescribe the temporary use of medication to be used in conjunction with behavior modification.
- Consider enrolling your dog in a training class. This may help establish a relationship between you and your dog in which you give commands and he obeys them. Be sure to choose a trainer who uses positive reinforcement methods. Understand that obedience classes alone won’t necessarily prevent or reduce dominance aggression.

### A Note about Children and Dogs

From your dog’s point of view, children, too, have a place in the dominance hierarchy. Because children are smaller and get down on the dog’s level to play, dogs often consider them to be playmates rather than superiors. Small children and dogs should never be left alone together without adult supervision. Older children should be taught how to play and interact appropriately and safely with dogs. Under no circumstances, however, should a child be left alone with a dog who has displayed signs of aggression.

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# Nothing in Life Is Free

## A Training Technique for Dogs

**D**OES YOUR DOG GET ON THE FURNITURE and refuse to get off? Nudge your hand and insist on being petted or played with? Refuse to come when called? Defend his food bowl or toys from you?

If so, a training technique called “nothing in life is free” may be just the solution you’re looking for. “Nothing in life is free” is not a magic pill that will solve a specific behavior problem. Instead, it’s a way of living with your dog that will help him behave better because he trusts and accepts you as his leader and is confident knowing his place in the family.

### How to Practice “Nothing in Life Is Free”

- Use positive reinforcement methods to teach your dog a few commands and tricks. “Sit,” “Down,” and “Stay” are useful commands. “Shake,” “Speak,” and “Roll over” are fun tricks to teach your dog.
- Once your dog has mastered a few commands, you can begin to practice “nothing in life is free.” Before you give your dog anything (food, a treat, a walk, a pat on the head), he must first perform one of the commands he has learned. See the chart below for examples.

- Once you’ve given the command, don’t give your dog what he wants until he does what you want. If he refuses to perform the command, walk away, come back a few minutes later, and start again. If your dog refuses to obey the command, be patient and remember that eventually he will have to obey your command to get what he wants.

Make sure your dog knows the command well and understands what you want before you begin practicing “nothing in life is free.”

### The Benefits of This Technique

- Most dogs assume a neutral or submissive role toward people, but some dogs will challenge their owners for dominance. Requiring a dominant dog to work for everything he wants is a safe, nonconfrontational way to establish control.

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YOU	YOUR DOG
Put your dog’s leash on to go for a walk	Must sit until you’ve put the leash on
Feed your dog	Must lie down and stay until you’ve put the bowl down
Play a game of fetch after work	Must sit and “shake hands” each time you throw the toy
Rub your dog’s belly while watching TV	Must lie down and roll over before being petted

- Dogs who may never display aggressive behavior such as growling, snarling, or snapping may still manage to manipulate you. These dogs may display affectionate behavior that borders on being “pushy,” such as nudging your hand to be petted or “worming” their way onto the furniture to be close to you. This technique gently reminds the dog that he must abide by your rules.
- Fearful dogs may become more confident by obeying commands. Having a strong leader and knowing his place in the hierarchy helps to make the submissive dog feel more secure.

### Why This Technique Works

Animals who live in groups, like dogs, establish a social structure within the group called a dominance hierarchy. This dominance hierarchy serves to maintain order, reduce conflict, and promote cooperation among pack members. To ensure that your home is a safe and happy place for pets and people, the humans in the household should assume the highest positions in the dominance hierarchy. Practicing “nothing in life is free” gently and effectively communicates to your dog that his position in the hierarchy is subordinate to yours.

From your dog’s point of view, children also have a place in this hierarchy. Because children are small and can get down on the dog’s level to play, dogs often consider them to be playmates rather than superiors. With the supervision of an adult, it’s a good idea to encourage children in the household to also practice “nothing in life is free” with the family dog.

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### Related topics at [www.petsforlife.org](http://www.petsforlife.org)

- Positive Reinforcement: Training Your Dog (or Cat!) with Treats and Praise

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# Dogs: Destructive Chewing

**S**OONER OR LATER EVERY DOG LOVER returns home to find some unexpected damage inflicted by his or her dog... or, more specifically, that dog's incisors and molars. Although dogs make great use of their vision and sense of smell to explore the world, one of their favorite ways to take in new information is to put their mouths to work.

Fortunately, chewing can be directed onto appropriate items so your dog isn't destroying items you value or jeopardizing his own safety. Until he's learned what he can and can't chew, however, you need to manage the situation as much as possible so he doesn't have the opportunity to chew on unacceptable objects.

## Taking Control by Managing the Situation

- Take responsibility for your own belongings: If you don't want it in your dog's mouth, don't make it available. Keep clothing, shoes, books, trash, eyeglasses, and remote control devices out of your dog's reach.
- Don't confuse your dog by offering him shoes and socks as toys and then expecting him to distinguish between his shoe and yours. Your dog's toys should be clearly distinguishable from household goods.
- Until your dog learns the house rules, confine him when you're unable to keep an eye on him. Choose a "safe place" that's dog proof, and provide fresh water and "safe" toys. If your dog is crate trained, you may also place him in his crate for short periods of time.
- Give your dog plenty of your time and attention. Your dog won't know how to behave if you don't teach him alternatives to inappropriate behavior, and he can't learn these when he's in the yard by himself.
- If you catch your dog chewing on something he shouldn't, interrupt the behavior with a loud noise, offer him an acceptable chew toy instead, and praise him lavishly when he takes the toy in his mouth.
- Have realistic expectations. At some point your dog will inevitably chew up something you value; this is often part of the transition to a new home. Your dog needs time to learn the house rules and you need to remember to take precautions and keep things out of his reach.

Chewing is normal behavior for curious puppies who may be teething, but adult dogs may engage in destructive chewing for any number of reasons. In order to deal with the behavior, you must first determine why your dog is chewing—and remember, he's not doing it to spite you.

## Play, Boredom, or Social Isolation

Normal play behavior sometimes leads to destruction, as it may involve digging, chewing, shredding, or shaking objects. Because dogs investigate objects by pawing at them and exploring them with their mouths, they may also inadvertently damage items in their environment. Your dog may be chewing for entertainment if:

- He's left alone for long periods without opportunities to interact with you.
- His environment is relatively barren, lacking playmates or toys.
- He's a puppy or adolescent (under three years old) and he doesn't have other outlets for his energy.
- He's a particularly active type of dog (like the herding or sporting breeds) who needs to be occupied to be happy.

## Solutions

- Play with your dog daily in a safe, fenced-in area. Playing fetch is a great way to use up your dog's excess energy without wearing you out!
- Go for a walk. Walks should be more than just "bathroom time." On-leash walks are important opportunities for you and your dog to be together. Allow time for sniffing, exploring, instruction, and praise.
- Increase your dog's opportunities for mental stimulation. Teach your dog a few commands or tricks and practice them daily. Take a dog training class; not only are they fun, but such classes teach commands important for your dog's safety and give you and your dog time to work toward a common goal.
- Provide your dog with lots of appropriate toys.
- Rotate your dog's toys to refresh his interest in them. "New" toys are always more interesting than old ones.

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- Try different kinds of toys, but when you introduce a new toy, keep an eye on your dog to make sure he won't tear it up and ingest the pieces.
- Consider the various types of toys that can be stuffed with food. Putting tidbits of food inside chew toys helps your dog focus on these toys rather than on unacceptable objects.
- Make your dog's favorite off-limits chew objects unattractive to him by covering them with heavy plastic, aluminum foil, hot pepper sauce, or a commercial "anti-chew" product.
- Consider a good "doggie day care" program for two or three days a week to help your dog work off some of his excess energy.

## Separation Anxiety

Dogs with separation anxiety tend to display behaviors that reflect a strong attachment to their owners. This includes following you from room to room, frantic greetings, and anxious responses whenever you prepare to leave the house. Factors that can precipitate a separation anxiety problem include:

- A change in the family's schedule that leaves your dog alone more often.
- A move to a new home.
- The death or loss of a family member or another family pet.
- A period at a shelter or boarding kennel.

Again, remember that these behaviors are not motivated by spite or revenge, but by anxiety. Punishment will only make the problem worse. Separation anxiety can be resolved by using counterconditioning and desensitization techniques.

## Attention-Seeking Behavior

Without realizing it, we often pay more attention to our dogs when they're misbehaving. Dogs who don't receive a lot of attention and reinforcement for appropriate behavior may engage in destructive behavior when their owners are present as a way to attract attention—even if the attention is "negative," such as a verbal scolding.

### Solutions

- Make sure your dog gets a lot of positive attention every day—playtime, walks, grooming, or just petting.

## Related topics at [www.petsforlife.org](http://www.petsforlife.org)

- Dog Toys and How to Use Them
- Helping Your Dog Overcome Fear of Thunder and Other Startling Noises
- "Nothing in Life Is Free": A Training Technique for Dogs
- Reducing Separation Anxiety in Dogs
- Using Aversives to Modify Your Dog's Behavior

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- Ignore bad behavior (as much as possible) and reward good behavior. Remember to reward your dog with praise and petting when he's playing quietly with appropriate toys.
- Make his favorite off-limits chew objects unattractive or unavailable to him. Use aversives on objects that cannot be put away.
- Teach your dog a "drop it" command, so that when he does pick up an off-limits object, you can use the command and praise him for complying. The best way to teach "drop it" is to practice exchanging a toy in his possession for a tidbit of food.
- Practice the concept of "Nothing in Life Is Free" with your dog. This gets your dog in the habit of complying with your commands and is a good way to make sure he gets lots of positive attention for doing the right things.

## Fears and Phobias

Your dog's destructive behavior may be a response to something he fears. Some dogs are afraid of loud noises. Your dog's destructive behavior may be caused by fear if he tends to be more destructive when he's exposed to loud noises, such as thunderstorms, firecrackers, or construction sounds, and if the primary damage is to doors, doorframes, window coverings, screens, or walls.

### Solutions

- Provide a "safe place" for your dog. Find out where he likes to go when he feels anxious, then allow access to that space or create a similar one for him to use when the fear stimulus is present.
- Don't comfort your dog when he's behaving fearfully. Try to get him to play with you or respond to commands he knows and give him praise and treats when he responds to you rather than the fear stimulus.
- Don't crate your dog unless he's thoroughly crate trained and considers the crate his safe place. If you put him in a crate to prevent destruction and he's not crate trained, he may injure himself or destroy the crate.

## What NOT to Do

Punishment is rarely effective in resolving destructive behavior problems and may even make the problem worse. Never discipline your dog after the fact. If you discover your dog has chewed an item but don't catch him in the act, it's too late to administer a correction. Your dog doesn't think, "I chewed those shoes an hour ago and that's why I'm being scolded now." People often believe their dog makes this connection because he runs and hides or "looks guilty." But dogs display submissive postures like cowering, running away, or hiding when they feel threatened by an angry tone of voice, body posture, or facial expression. Your dog doesn't know what he's done wrong; he only knows that you're upset. Punishment after the fact will not only fail to eliminate the undesirable behavior, but may also provoke other undesirable behaviors.

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# Understanding Your Puppy's Behavior and Development

**W**ELL-SOCIALIZED DOGS ARE MORE LIKELY to have well-socialized puppies. Pups often mirror their mothers' calm or fearful attitude toward people; this is a normal part of their socialization. But you can play a vital role, too, by petting, talking, and playing with puppy to help him develop good "people skills."

Puppies are usually weaned at six to seven weeks, but are still learning important skills as their mother gradually leaves them for longer periods of time. Ideally, puppies should stay with their littermates (or other "role-model" dogs) for at least 12 weeks.

Puppies separated from their littermates too early often fail to develop appropriate social skills, such as learning how to send and receive signals, what an "inhibited bite" (acceptable mouthing pressure) means, how far to go in play-wrestling, and so forth. Play is important for puppies because it increases their physical coordination, social skills, and learning limits. By interacting with their mother and littermates, puppies explore the ranking process (who's in charge) and also learn how to be a dog.

Skills not acquired during the first eight weeks may be lost forever. While these stages are important and fairly consistent, a dog's mind remains receptive to new experiences and lessons well beyond puppyhood. Most dogs are still puppies, in mind and body, through the first two years of life.

## Stages of Puppy Development:

### *0–2 Weeks: Neonatal Period*

- Puppy is most influenced by his mother.
- Senses of touch and taste are present at birth.

### *2–4 Weeks: Transitional Period*

- Puppy is most influenced by his mother and littermates.
- Eyes open, teeth begin to come in, and senses of hearing and smell develop.
- Puppy begins to stand, walk a little, wag tail, and bark.
- By the fourth or fifth week, eyesight is well-developed.

### *3–12 Weeks: Socialization Period*

- During this period, puppy needs opportunities to meet other dogs and people.
- By three to five weeks, puppy becomes aware of his surroundings, companions (both canine and human), and relationships, including play.
- By four to six weeks, puppy is most influenced by littermates and is learning about being a dog.

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- From four to 12 weeks, puppy remains influenced by littermates and is also influenced by people. Puppy learns to play, develops social skills, learns the inhibited bite, explores social structure/ranking, and improves physical coordination.
- By five to seven weeks, puppy develops curiosity and explores new experiences. Puppy needs positive “people” experiences during this time.
- By seven to nine weeks, puppy is refining his physical skills and coordination, and can begin to be housetrained. Puppy has full use of senses.
- By eight to 10 weeks, puppy experiences real fear involving normal objects and experiences; puppy needs positive training during this time.
- By nine to 12 weeks, puppy is refining reactions, developing social skills with littermates (appropriate interactions), and exploring the environment and objects. Puppy begins to focus on people; this is a good time to begin formal training.

### **3–6 Months: Ranking Period**

- Puppy is most influenced by “playmates,” who may now include those of other species.
- Puppy begins to see and use ranking (dominance and submission) within the household (the puppy’s “pack”), including humans.
- Puppy begins teething (and associated chewing).
- At four months of age, puppy experiences another fear stage.

### **6–18 Months: Adolescence**

- Puppy is most influenced by human and dog “pack” members.
- At seven to nine months, puppy goes through a second chewing phase, part of exploring territory.
- Puppy increases exploration of dominance, including challenging humans.
- If not spayed or neutered, puppy experiences beginnings of sexual behavior. (Spaying or neutering your puppy at an early age will likely increase the health benefits of the surgery and increase his lifespan.)

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# Housetraining Your Puppy

**C**ONTRARY TO popular belief, housetraining a puppy requires far more than a few stacks of old newspapers—it calls for vigilance, patience, and plenty of commitment. By following the procedures outlined below, you can minimize house soiling incidents, but virtually every puppy will have an accident in the house, and more likely, several. Expect this—it's part of raising a puppy. The more consistent you are in following the basic housetraining procedures, however, the faster your puppy will learn acceptable behavior. It may take several weeks to housetrain your puppy, and with some of the smaller breeds, it might take longer.

## Establish a Routine

Like babies, puppies do best on a regular schedule. Take your puppy outside frequently—at least every two hours—and immediately after he wakes up from a nap, after playing, and after eating or drinking.

Praise your puppy lavishly every time he eliminates outdoors—you can even give him a treat—but remember to do so immediately after he's finished eliminating, not after he comes back inside the house. This step is vital, because rewarding your dog for eliminating outdoors is the only way he'll know what's expected of him.

Pick a bathroom spot near the door, and always take your puppy to that spot using a leash. Take him out for a longer walk or some playtime only after he has eliminated. If you clean up an accident in the house, take the soiled rags or paper towels and leave them in the bathroom spot. The smell will help your puppy recognize the area as the place he is supposed to eliminate. While your puppy is eliminating, use a word or phrase like “go potty” that you can eventually use before he eliminates to remind him what to do.

Put your puppy on a regular feeding schedule and feed him a high-quality diet to make housetraining easier.

Depending on their age, puppies usually need to be fed three or four times a day. Feeding your puppy at the same times each day will make it more likely that he'll eliminate at consistent times as well, and that makes housetraining easier for both of you.

## Keep Your Eyes Peeled

Don't give your puppy an opportunity to soil in the house; keep an eye on him whenever he's indoors. You can tether him to you with a six-foot leash, or use baby gates to keep him in the room where you are. Watch for signs that he needs to eliminate, like sniffing around or circling. When you see these signs, immediately grab the leash and take him outside to his bathroom spot. If he eliminates, praise him lavishly and reward him with a treat.

## Confinement

When you're unable to watch your puppy at all times, he should be confined to an area small enough that he won't want to eliminate there. The space should be just big enough for him to comfortably stand, lie down, and turn around in. You can use a portion of a bathroom or laundry room blocked off with baby gates. Or you may want to crate train your puppy and use the crate to confine him. (Be sure to learn how to use a crate

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humanely as a method of confinement.) If your puppy has spent several hours in confinement, you'll need to take him directly to his bathroom spot as soon as you let him out, and praise him when he eliminates.

## Oops!

Expect your puppy to have a few accidents in the house—it's a normal part of housetraining. Here's what to do when that happens:

- When you catch him in the act of eliminating in the house, do something to interrupt him, like make a startling noise (be careful not to scare him). Immediately take him to his bathroom spot, praise him, and give him a treat if he finishes eliminating there.
- Don't punish your puppy for eliminating in the house. If you find a soiled area, it's too late to administer a correction. Just clean it up. Rubbing your puppy's nose in it, taking him to the spot and scolding him, or any other punishment will only make him afraid of you or afraid to eliminate in your presence. In fact, punishment will often do more harm than good.
- Cleaning the soiled area is very important because puppies are highly motivated to continue soiling in areas that smell like urine or feces.

It's extremely important that you use the supervision and confinement procedures outlined above to prevent the number of accidents. If you allow your puppy to eliminate frequently in the house, he'll get confused about where he's supposed to eliminate, which will prolong the housetraining process.

## Paper Training

A puppy under six months of age cannot be expected to control his bladder for more than a few hours at a time. If you have to be away from home more than four or five hours a day, this may not be the best time for you to get a puppy; instead, you may want to consider an older dog, who can wait for your return.

But if you're already committed to having a puppy and must be away for long periods of time, you'll need to make arrangements for someone, such as a responsible neighbor or a professional pet sitter, to take him outside to eliminate.

## Related topics at [www.petsforlife.org](http://www.petsforlife.org)

- [Crate Training Your Dog](#)

Or you'll need to train him to eliminate in a specific place indoors. Be aware, however, that doing so can prolong the process of housetraining. Teaching your puppy to eliminate on newspaper may create a lifelong surface preference, meaning that even as an adult he may eliminate on any newspaper lying around the living room.

When your puppy must be left alone for long periods of time, confine him to an area with enough room for a sleeping space, a playing space, and a separate place to eliminate. In the area designated as the elimination area, use either newspapers or a sod box. To make a sod box, place sod in a container such as a child's small plastic swimming pool. You can also find dog litter products at a pet supply store. If you clean up an accident in the house, put the soiled rags or paper towels in the designated elimination area. The smell will help your puppy recognize the area as the place where he is supposed to eliminate.

## Other Types of House Soiling Problems

If you've consistently followed the housetraining procedures and your puppy continues to eliminate in the house, there may be another reason for his behavior.

- **Medical Problems:** House soiling can often be caused by physical problems such as a urinary tract infection or a parasite infection. Check with your veterinarian to rule out any possibility of disease or illness.
- **Submissive/Excitement Urination:** Some dogs, especially young ones, temporarily lose control of their bladders when they become excited or feel threatened. This usually occurs during greetings or periods of intense play or when they're about to be punished.
- **Territorial Urine-Marking:** Dogs sometimes deposit small amounts of urine or feces to scent-mark their territory. Both male and female dogs do this, and it most often occurs when they believe their territory has been invaded.
- **Separation Anxiety:** Dogs who become anxious when they're left alone may house soil as a result. Usually, there are other symptoms as well, such as destructive behavior or vocalization.
- **Fears or Phobias:** When animals become frightened, they may lose control of their bladder or bowels. If your puppy is afraid of loud noises such as thunderstorms or fireworks, he may house soil when he's exposed to these sounds.

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# Preparing Pets for a New Baby

**C**ONGRATULATIONS, YOU'RE EXPECTING A BABY! If your family already includes a pet, you'll need to help that first "baby" adjust to the new one you'll soon bring home. You can help your pet cope with this big change in much the same way parents help children understand that a new brother or sister will be joining the family. By following the tips below, you can ease your pet's stress, help her welcome your new baby, and ensure that your pet stays where she belongs—with you and your growing family.

## Can I Keep My Cat?

If you're pregnant, you've probably heard of toxoplasmosis because it can cause serious birth defects. However, toxoplasmosis is a rare disease in the United States and one that can easily be avoided. While the disease-causing parasite can be found in the feces of cats who ingest raw meat, birds, mice, or contaminated soil, toxoplasmosis is more commonly found in uncooked or undercooked meat.

If you're concerned about possible exposure, ask your obstetrician to perform a simple blood test. If the result shows you were exposed to toxoplasmosis during pregnancy, you may be given medication, and your baby may be tested and treated soon after birth. Keep in mind that the odds of contracting toxoplasmosis during pregnancy are extremely low, and even lower for your baby. Being pregnant does not mean you have to give up living with and caring for your beloved cat. Toxoplasmosis is easily avoided by practicing good hygiene and responsible pet care. Just follow these simple steps to reduce the risk:

- Avoid handling or eating uncooked meat.
- Keep your cat safely indoors and away from wildlife.
- Have someone else clean the litter box daily.

- If you must clean the litter box, wear rubber gloves and thoroughly wash your hands afterward.
- Feed cats only commercially prepared cat food.

## How Will My Pet React?

No matter how much you plan ahead, the addition of a new family member may be difficult for your pet. Remember, your dog or cat was your first "baby" and is used to being the center of your attention. So it's understandable that she may experience something akin to sibling rivalry when you introduce a new human baby into your household.

You can minimize this feeling by working with her *before* you bring home your baby. For example, because your new baby will demand a lot of your time and energy, gradually accustom your pet to spending less time with you. Drastically decreasing attention and frequently scolding, ignoring, or isolating your pet *after* the baby comes home will likely make your pet feel stressed. If your pet is particularly attached to the mother-to-be, another family member should develop a closer relationship with the animal. That way, your pet can still feel loved and provided for while mom is busy with the baby.

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## How Can I Prepare My Pet?

Below are several suggestions to make introducing your pet and baby safer and smoother for all. Be sure to carry out these changes months before the baby's arrival to best prepare your pet.

- Take your pet to the veterinarian for a routine health exam and necessary vaccinations.
- Spay or neuter your pet. Not only do sterilized pets typically have fewer health problems associated with their reproductive systems, but they are also calmer and less likely to bite.
- Consult with a veterinarian and pediatrician if the thought of your newborn interacting with the family pet makes you uncomfortable. By working with these experts before your baby is born, you can resolve problems early and put your mind at ease.
- Address any pet training and behavior problems. If your pet exhibits fear and anxiety, now is the time to get help from an animal behavior specialist.
- If your pet's behavior includes gentle nibbling, pouncing, or swatting at you and others, redirect that behavior to appropriate objects.
- Get your pet used to nail trims.
- Train your pet to remain calmly on the floor beside you until you invite him on your lap, which will soon cradle a newborn.
- Consider enrolling in a training class with your dog, and practice training techniques. Training allows you to safely and humanely control your dog's behavior and enhances the bond between you and your pet.
- Encourage friends with infants to visit your home to accustom your pet to babies. Supervise all pet and infant interactions.
- Accustom your pet to baby-related noises months before the baby is expected. For example, play recordings of a baby crying, turn on the mechanical infant swing, and use the rocking chair. Make these positive experiences for your pet by offering a treat or playtime.
- To discourage your pet from jumping on the baby's crib and changing table, apply double-sided carpet tape to the furniture.

- If the baby's room will be off-limits to your pet, install a sturdy barrier such as a removable gate (available at pet or baby supply stores) or, for jumpers, even a screen door. Because these barriers still allow your pet to see and hear what's happening in the room, he'll feel less isolated from the family and more comfortable with the new baby noises.
- Use a baby doll to help your pet get used to the real thing. Carry around a swaddled baby doll, take the doll in the stroller when you walk your dog, and use the doll to get your pet used to routine baby activities, such as bathing and diaper changing.
- Talk to your pet about the baby, using the baby's name if you've selected one.
- Sprinkle baby powder or baby oil on your skin so your pet becomes familiar with the new smells.
- Finally, plan ahead to make sure your pet gets proper care while you're at the birthing center.

## What Do We Do after Our Baby Is Born?

Welcoming a new baby is exciting for your family. Remember when you first brought home your dog or cat? But before you bring your baby home from the hospital, have your partner or friend take home something with the baby's scent (such as a blanket) for your pet to investigate.

When you return from the hospital, your pet may be eager to greet you and receive your attention. Have someone else take the baby into another room while you give your pet a warm, but calm, welcome. Keep some treats handy so you can distract your pet.

After the initial greeting, you can bring your pet with you to sit next to the baby; reward your pet with treats for appropriate behavior. Remember, you want your pet to view associating with the baby as a positive experience. To prevent anxiety or injury, never force your pet to get near the baby, and always supervise any interaction.

Life will no doubt be hectic caring for your new baby, but try to maintain regular routines as much as possible to help your pet adjust. And be sure to spend one-on-one quality time with your pet each day—it may help relax you, too. With proper training, supervision, and adjustments, you, your new baby, and your pet should be able to live together safely and happily as one (now larger) family.

## Related topics at [www.petsforlife.org](http://www.petsforlife.org)

- [Your Pregnancy and Your Cat](#)

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