

Most experienced dog owners are familiar with common dog behavior problems, but some may wonder why dogs exhibit these behaviors. Barking, digging, destructive chewing and many other common dog behaviors are often misunderstood and mishandled by dog owners. Thoroughly understanding the most common dog behavior problem is the first step to solving and preventing them. Here are some behaviour problems and steps to help minimize your dog's intention to do so.

## **DIGGING**

Some wild dog relatives, like foxes and wolves, dig dens to protect themselves from extreme temperatures and predators. Our pet dogs share the same desire to sleep in and under things that resemble a den. Dogs also dig when trying to get warm or stay cool, to entertain themselves, to bury valued items, and when hunting ground-dwelling animals. Digging is in their nature, but if you can distinguish why your dog digs then it can be easier to maintain.

### ***If Your Dog Digs to Keep Cool or Get Comfortable:***

Dogs living outside in very hot or cold weather often dig holes to sleep in, especially if they don't have access to proper shelter. Older dogs may start digging later in life if they become unable to regulate their own body temperature as well as they used to.

1. If your dog digs in an attempt to cool off, provide an insulated dog house, a shallow wading pool, or shade. Hot dogs like to lie flat on hard, cool surfaces, so give your dog access to those.
2. If your dog digs in an attempt to keep warm, provide an insulated dog house, give her extra blankets or a differently shaped bed that she can burrow into, or move her bed to a less drafty location.

### ***If Your Dog Digs to Entertain Herself:***

Many dogs dig for the fun of it. This type of digging is harder to treat because the action of digging is rewarding, so try to re-direct your dogs digging to a more acceptable place.

1. Encourage your dog to dig in an area you have allocated specifically for this activity. Build a digging pit that is especially enticing.

2. Try to discourage digging in inappropriate locations by installing garden fencing around areas where you don't want your dog to dig. Just the effort of going over or through a fence will stop some dogs.

### ***If Your Dog Digs to Bury Her Stuff:***

Dogs dig to bury their own things; they also dig to retrieve other dogs' hidden goodies when they discover them. The best way to eliminate this type of digging is to refrain from giving your dog treats food or chew bones that she will not finish immediately. Alternatively, you can build your dog a digging pit and encourage her to bury items there, instead of in your favorite flower bed. This is particularly great solution if your dog seems to prefer digging in sandy dirt.

### **DESTRUCTIVE CHEWING**

It's normal for puppies and dogs to chew on objects as they explore the world. Chewing accomplishes a number of things for a dog. For young dogs, it's a way to relieve pain that might be caused by incoming teeth. For older dogs, its nature's way of keeping jaws strong and teeth clean. There are many reasons for these behaviours like;

#### ***Separation Anxiety***

Dogs who chew to relieve the stress of separation anxiety usually only chew when left alone or chew most intensely when left alone.

#### ***Fabric Sucking***

Some dogs lick, suck and chew at fabrics. Some experts believe that this behavior results from having been weaned too early (before seven or eight weeks of age).

#### ***Hunger***

A dog on a calorie-restricted diet might chew and destroy objects in an attempt to find additional sources of nutrition. Dogs usually direct this kind of chewing toward objects related to food or that smell like food.

#### ***Puppy Teething***

The discomfort of teething motivates puppies to chew. Some recommend giving puppies special dog toys that can be frozen or frozen wet washcloths to chew, which might help numb

teething pain. Although puppies do need to chew on things, gentle guidance can teach your puppy to restrict chewing to appropriate objects, like his own toys.

The easiest way to tame your dog from destructive chewing is to “Dog Proof” your home, by putting valuables away like hiding shoes in a closet. Provide your dog with plenty of his own toys. Pay attention to the types of toys that keep him chewing for long periods of time and keep those specific ones available.

## **COMPULSIVE BEHAVIOUR**

A dog who displays compulsive behavior repeatedly performs one or more behaviors over and over. The behavior he’s doing doesn’t seem to have any purpose, but he’s compelled to do it anyway. Dogs display many different kinds of compulsions, such as spinning, pacing, tail chasing, or excessive licking and toy fixation.

Some breeds are more likely to develop certain compulsive disorders. Many Doberman pinschers and Labrador retrievers have excessive licking problems and Bull terriers repetitively spin more often than other breeds.

A dog’s lifestyle can sometimes contribute to this development. These are examples of dogs in situations that can contribute to the development of compulsive disorders:

- Dogs who are frequently tied up or confined and forced to live in small areas
- Dogs who experience social conflict, such as a long separation from a companion
- Dogs who lack opportunities to engage in normal canine behavior, such as socializing
- Dogs who are physically abused or punished randomly and unpredictably

To treat your dog’s compulsive behaviour disorder, you first have to identify and remove the problem. By doing this your dog’s stress level will reduce. Of course, it’s not always possible to avoid or get rid of the thing or situation that seems to upset your dog.

In this case distract and redirect your dog’s attention. As soon as your dog starts to engage in a compulsive behavior, distract him. Give him something else to do. You can use food, toys, play or praise. You can also ask your dog to perform a previously learned behavior or trick that he can’t do at the same time as the compulsive behavior. For example, if your dog starts to spin or chase his tail, you can ask him to sit or lie down. If your dog starts to lick, you can ask him to shake or perform another trick instead. Once your dog reliably responds when you ask him to



# Behaviour Issues in Dogs

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do something you've taught him in a stress-free environment, you can start to integrate that skill into his daily routine and use it whenever you see compulsive behavior begin.

Behaviour issues in dogs can be a struggle at first, but understanding and identifying your dogs behaviours can help maintain them for the future. Provide lots of physical and mental stimulation. Exercising your dog's mind and body can greatly enrich his life, decrease stress and provide appropriate outlets for normal dog behaviors.