

Sit Happens

Tips and Techniques for Training Your Urban Animal



With Trudi Thorpe



Trudi Thorpe runs a dog behaviour and training company dogLOGIC based in Sydney. As Trudi says "DOGS DOGS DOGS...A childhood obsession that I never grew out of." She devises and implements individual behavioural strategies and obedience techniques based on 17 years of studying dog problems and problem dogs.

To ask Trudi a question regarding behaviour or request a training tip you can email her at behaviour@urbananimal.net



Question:

My older dog constantly growls and monsters my younger dog at feeding time. What should I do to stop this?

Answer:

The type of behaviour displayed by your older dog in this situation is relatively normal and certainly not uncommon. The way he acts is governed entirely by his "pack mentality" and is basically his way of establishing and enforcing his position (and that of your younger dog) in the Pack.

Pack position is determined by your dogs between each other through control of and access to various resources, such as food, toys, sleeping areas and attention from people. Of these resources, it is usually feed time where displays of dominance will be most obvious. This is because to a dog, the whole ritual surrounding feeding establishes and reaffirms the pecking order as it stands at present.

As hard as it may be, it is best not to involve yourself in the process of determining and maintaining pack position because your dogs will establish who fits in where regardless of your wishes or preferences.

That being the fact, it is vitally important that no matter where your dogs have each other placed in the hierarchy - you always remain on top. One of the best ways to go about this is to control feed times.

Choose opposite corners of their feed area and have your dogs sit and stay (you may initially need some help from another person if your dogs don't sit and stay). Put their bowls down and make them wait for (no longer than) 10 seconds. Then give them the ok to eat. Do this before every meal time. It not only takes the focus off each other at this time, but it also redirects their focus onto you confirming your position as alpha or top dog.

Question:

How is the best way to discipline my puppy for things he is doing wrong without scaring or intimidating him?

Answer:

Puppies need to be disciplined for undesirable behaviour, just as humans do. They need to be taught what is right and what is wrong.

At no time does discipline need to be harsh.

Because Puppies have no comprehension of what's good and what's bad, discipline should be taught in a patient and positive way so that the lesson can be absorbed.

Discipline should be taught by way of guidance using techniques such as creative avoidance (avoiding situations where upon you know he will react in an inappropriate way and any attempt to stop the behaviour will be ineffective) and or redirecting (seeing him go to do something inappropriate and redirecting his attention and/or focus to something else using positive stimulation like clapping your hands together whilst calling his name.

Reprimand needs to be instantaneous, swift and should be delivered in such a way as to make an impact - the greater the impact, the quicker he learns.

Reprimand needs to be such that it changes the configuration of behavioural triggers that control his focus and attention so that he acts upon your wishes every time, rather than on his immediate impulses - be it stopping an undesirable action when you tell him, or coming to you when you call him.

Don't repeatedly reprimand. If he's not responding to your method of reprimand or he continues a particular behaviour in which you have repeatedly roused on him for, chances are that he just doesn't understand what it is that you're trying to teach him or that he is associating the reprimand with something completely different.

If you find this to be the case, re assess the situation and change your method.

Question:

My dog chases small dogs and this has become really embarrassing in the park - I want to continue having him off leash but he freaks out some of the smaller dogs - do I have to keep him on leash for this to cease. Other dog walkers are starting to avoid me and some get really angry. What should I do?

Answer:

OBEDIENCE, OBEDIENCE, OBEDIENCE! When it comes to being in the park where there are other dogs (and indeed people), interactive reactions - good or bad - will always vary depending on a myriad of different reasons. In your particular situation whereupon there is a common denominator- ie, small dogs that evoke an inappropriate response from your dog you'll usually find the problem is exacerbated by your body language. You've been at the park for a short while with no problem and a small dog arrives. EEEEE!!! Your natural reaction is panic a little, call your dog and put him straight back on the lead, and whilst this will go little way to helping solve your problem, it certainly won't help in the long run. Which brings us to our first point; be aware of your body language. He is.

The answer to your problem here is CONTROL. The more control you have over your dog, the less trouble he is going to get you into - IN ANY SITUATION. And control comes through obedience training. Which brings us to our second point; all dogs need some form of obedience training, and a lot of the time it need only to be simple to give you control and put you back in charge. Obedience gives you the opportunity to train your dog to obey you at all times, in a controlled environment.

The end result here is that you are at the park and see a small dog approaching, you call your dog to you and have him calmly sit beside you. Now how the situation pans out from here is entirely up to you, which is a nice change from it being entirely up to him!

"A barking dog is often more useful than a sleeping lion"
Washington Irving



Q: With the kid's various sports on of a weekend, I simply don't have time to attend obedience classes with my dog. What are some basic obedience exercises that I can teach my dog that are easy and effective.

A: These obedience exercises are specifically designed to enable you to further develop over time, a certain level of communication, understanding, trust and mutual respect.

They will assist in developing him confidence and you'll find that he will actually enjoy him training session because you are giving him something to think about.

- Heel
- Using his name and the word heel, step off with your left foot.
- Keep your control hand close to him at all times.
- Encourage him along, make it fun.
- Sit
- Be sure he responds directly on command.
- Act immediately if he doesn't and make him.
- Lots of praise.
- Stay
- Command him to sit
- Hand the leash over to your left hand.
- Bring your right hand up to his face with your palm open and command him to stay.
- Step off with your right foot, and pivot in front of him.
- Differ the period that you stand in front of him for.
- Keeping him steady, walk around behind him and return to him right.
- Training Points
- Try to give him a training session for 15 minutes every day.
- It sets out a vast array of guidelines for him to follow.
- It develops a sound understanding of house rules.
- It creates a bond of mutual respect and understanding.
- It teaches discipline.
- Make your sessions fun.
- The more fun you make it, the easier it will be.

Q: My dog is house trained but pees in one corner of my guest bedroom. What do I do to break him out of the habit? Is there anything I can put down on the floor to deter him?

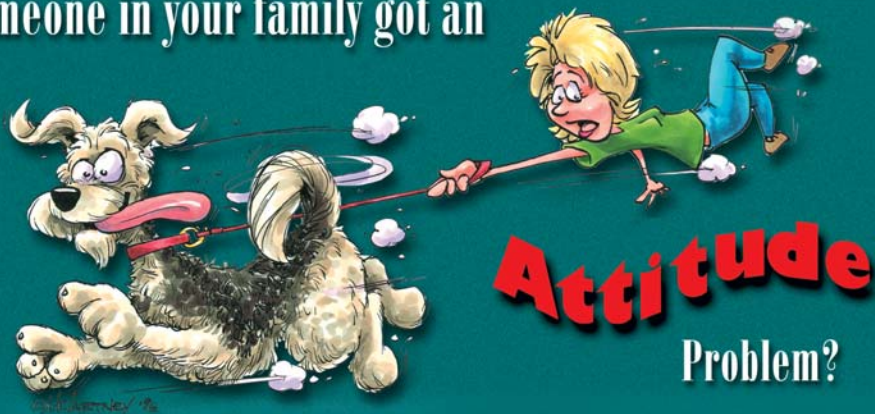
A: First step is to barricade the doorway (preferably with a child gate) to the guest bedroom so that your dog can't access that room. I suggest that you do this with a gate rather than closing the door so that your dog is aware that the room is still there (closing the door can sometimes just move the problem to another room). Second step is to work on eradicating the smell of urine deep within the carpet. Because dogs are attracted to the smell of ammonia, make sure that you clean the carpet with a non ammonia based product then use a combination of 50% white vinegar and 50% water and spray on the area to completely neutralise the smell. The final step is to teach your dog that it is not to enter that room at all. Do this by "set up". Do not call your dog, but remove the barrier and walk into the room whilst your dog is watching you and I guarantee he will go to follow you in. Take one step inside the doorway and turn around JUST BEFORE he enters and tell him "NO". It is important at this stage not to let him follow you right into the room and then tell him no - STOP HIM BEFORE THE FACT. Do this exercise randomly 4 times a day and before long, he simply won't go in there at all.

Having put that into action, remember that there is no such thing as "sometimes". In creating and implementing house rules and guidelines, make sure that the rules are specific, consistent and unbreakable. Ambiguous rules create ambiguous results. If he is not allowed in that room - that means NEVER.



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 Louis Sabin

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