



Sit Happens

Tips and Techniques for Training Your Urban Animal

My 2-year old Westie (West Highland White Terrier), has this weird behaviour towards the ironing board. Basically when I put the ironing board up or down he races from one end of the house and attacks the legs of the board, growling and carrying on. The ironing board makes a screeching noise so is this what is triggering this behaviour? When it first happened I thought it was funny but my boyfriend thinks this behaviour is psychotic. I've tried to stop the noisy board with WD40 but he can still hear it and skids across the room to get to it. I always thought ironing was a chore and now it really has become quite bizarre.

Sounds like your dog's behaviour began as emotional reaction to the screeching noise of your ironing board and has over time developed into a learned behaviour. The best way to go about treating his 'psychotic' behaviour you describe, is to desensitise him. Desensitising is to expose your dog to a very low level of what he is sensitive to and distract him away from the negative stimulus with lots of attention and other positive reinforcement only when he is calm. Over time, you increase the intensity of the stimulus, and only reward calm behaviour.

To start, I suggest you pull the ironing board out and simply lay it on the floor (don't move it up or down). If your dog starts reacting, move away from it and call him to you. Praise him when he comes over and speak to him in a calm voice. Once he is calm ignore the board completely-it won't be long before his curiosity gets the better of him. Encouraging him to investigate at his own pace and realising that it poses no threat. Keep the board laying on the floor for the rest of the day so that he gets used to moving around and over it.

If he is comfortable with it the following day, stand it up on its end and lean it against a wall (don't put it up or down) and start the process again. Keep your sessions short and upbeat. If he is moving around the board happily the following day (you may have to send your ironing to your Mum this week), start handling the board-moving it around, swapping it hand to hand. Continue this until there is no reaction at all to the board, whereupon you can attempt moving it up an inch and so repeating the same steps as above until you can move it up and down freely with no reaction from him. Desensitising takes a very dedicated person because it involves not only changing the dogs behaviour and habits, but also their own.



Trudi Thorpe - dogLOGIC

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

I've had an inside rabbit for three years now and she's really a big part of my life. She's had free reign to go through the house and she's been my constant companion for the years I've had her. Here's my question - I would now like to get a dog but don't want a new dog to freak her out or restrict her in anyway. What would be the best way to introduce a dog into my home? Would it be better to get a puppy rather than an older dog? Is there some method of introduction with both animals I can follow that allows my rabbit still to have her freedom without putting her in a caged environment?

It is certainly not uncommon for rabbits and dogs to live compatibly in the same household. Both animals are capable of getting along happily together, some even developing close relationships and providing company for each other. Having said that, it's important to understand that the successful outcomes of these relationships are rarely the result of pure luck, but rather a carefully engineered plan that is implemented and closely followed from the very first moment of introduction.

Because of the predatory nature of dogs, rabbits can be seen as prey, and therefore the first introduction between your rabbit and a new dog is probably the most critical step in developing the basis of their relationship. Whatever happens in that first meeting will have a major impact on the way they react and behave toward each other from that moment on.

Puppies are usually easier to integrate into this type of scenario as they are very impressionable and tend to look to us for guidance. When choosing a puppy, it advisable to take individual breed characteristics into account (ie: a greyhound would probably be less suitable than say a pug).

The first introduction should be made with your puppy on a lead. Don't approach your rabbit, but stay in one spot, a distance away so that they can see each other. This gives your rabbit the opportunity to assess the situation without feeling stressed or in danger. Keep your puppy under control by having him sit beside you. Creating and maintaining a positive environment during this time will greatly assist you in your quest for happiness. Repeat this process daily until your rabbit is feeling confident enough to either approach you or have you approach her. These initial encounters of uncompromising management on your part may last weeks, sometimes even months before both are ready to take the next step, which would be repeating the same process as above, but this time off leash. Gradually allowing them more freedom little by little over time. By taking it slowly day by day and ensuring that you are always in control of the situation it wont be long before they become accustomed to having each other around. As for the future, I strongly suggest that any interaction between your rabbit and your dog be monitored at all times.



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