

Sit Happens

Tips & Techniques for Training Your Urban Animal



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 18 years of studying dog problems and problem dogs.

E: trudi@doglogic.com.au

Ph: 9518 3827

Mobile: 0419 999 975

Ask Trudi a question regarding behaviour by emailing behaviour@urbananimal.net

Dear Trudi,

We have a 6 month-old Staffy (Otto) and we've been attending dog training every week since he was 11 weeks old. He's obedient and learning all commands, but he's recently started digging in the garden and also chewing everything in sight—our wooden furniture, sprinkler system, mats and more! We've supplied him with numerous chewys, bones and toys, but we are still struggling with him. Please if you could advise us what to do I would really appreciate any solutions.

Chewing and digging is as normal to a dog as barking. They will do these things at the best of times, but magnify it tenfold when they are left unattended or alone. Because of their interactive nature, dogs become bored very easily when left for periods by themselves and as a result, will start looking for things to do to amuse themselves. Chewing is a natural dog therapy to relieve stress, anxiety or loneliness associated with being by themselves. They don't do it out of spite or anger, they do it because they are dogs.

By providing him with numerous chewys, bones and toys you're on the right track, but regardless of how many items you have out there for him, it won't take long before they begin to look more and more bored, and the sprinkler system looks more and more fun.

The trick here is to provide *variety*. Start by collecting ALL of his toys, bone and chewys up and then only putting one of each type out, rotating them on a daily basis. When you're at home, take time to play with him and his toys, throwing them and having him bring them back. Create a game of hiding them and having him find them so that he associates his toys with fun rather than being inanimate objects.

Bones are especially great if only given at special times, rather than being available all the time. Give him a large marrowbone in the morning and then collect it up when you get home so that you can put it out again the following morning. This way, he always has something good to chew on when he is left alone.

Exercise is another great way of fending off destruction. As well as a good long afternoon walk, a quick but upbeat walk in the morning just before going out stimulates the senses and helps eradicate pent up energy that combined with the above, leaves a calmer, happier more relaxed dog.

Hi Trudi,

My dog is a five year-old Labrador, who was uncontrollable when we got him at the age of 18 months. He has developed into the most lovable and friendly dog, but weighs over 44kg and is difficult for me to handle on a leash as he tends to charge other dogs on occasions.

I have been putting him on a 'halti' when we walk in public, although at the park he is fine. Why does he charge dogs, and why is it not predictable? He may do nothing at all one day, and then do it to all the dogs the next. I am sure my own fear has now made it worse as I probably tense up each time a dog passes. I feel embarrassed as I tell people he is friendly and then he runs over their dog like a furry bulldozer. What should I do? (this feels like a Dr Phil please help letter!!!)

Most dogs become very excited at the very prospect of going out for a walk, and this can be brought on by even just the sight of your walking shoes in your hand. The anticipation mounts with the jingle of the house keys as they go into your pocket and just picking up the lead is enough to start the adrenalin pumping through his body. So by the time you actually walk to the front door, your dog is already full of excitement and anticipation and this behaviour simply continues outside.

Charging other dogs is simply an over exuberant greeting action triggered by the excited state he is in. His unpredictable behaviour will be governed by a myriad of different reasons, the more obvious ones being the length of time he has been alone for, the length of time between walks, subtle changes in his routine, and yes—you guessed it—your body language.

If you want to change the way that he acts and conducts himself on a walk, you need to teach him the way that you would like him to behave. By following some pretty simple guidelines, you two should be strolling along happily together within no time at all.

Good behaviour starts from home. Basic obedience and some simple words also play a big role in lead control ie: sit, stay, wait, ok. Have him 'sit' and 'wait' quietly while you attach his lead. Take him to the door and make him 'sit' and 'stay' while you open it. Tell him when it's 'ok' to move out. If he attempts to pull, push or drag you, stop and calmly tell him to 'sit' then start again.

When out walking, have him 'sit' at every street corner and wait until you give him the go ahead to cross. If you see another dog approaching, have him sit and wait until the dog has passed (you may find it easier across the street to start).



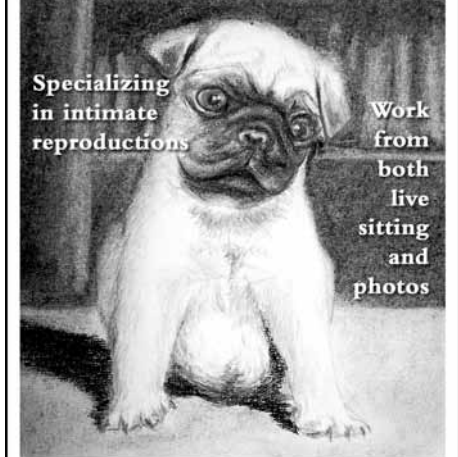
Photo by David Lourie



Have your pet captured in the finest media, both traditional and contemporary.

Pet Portraits

Contact Keith on 0438 296 488 or khchidz@bigpond.net.au



View others at www.chidzart.com.au

Walking on the lead means staying within a restricted area around you and abiding by your walking rules. He can greet other dogs and sniff around all he likes when you get to the park.

By walking him every day and being consistent in your walking routine, you'll find that he will respond accordingly.

Trudi - how you can stop our just turned two year-old German Shepherd, PJ, from being petrified of the vacuum cleaner. Ever since she was a puppy, if we got the vacuum cleaner out, she would run out of the house into the garden and not come back in till she made sure the vacuum was put away.

Her phobia has got worse and now every time you open the cupboard where the vacuum is kept (even before you remove it) she has gone running and cowering and has even escaped from the garden to get away. She is also petrified of thunderstorms and firework noises—is this related?

It's not uncommon for dogs to have some type of apprehension toward the vacuum cleaner—I know I do!

But unlike me, this apprehension in dogs is usually the result of the very first encounter with this huge, noisy monster when they are tiny puppies and is predominantly fear based. As for the cupboard, well, that's simply just where the monster lives.

Fireworks and Thunder is also a common phobia with dogs and once again, usually derives from the noise. You'll find with some dogs that even an overcast day will unsettle them.

There is no point in attempting to convince them that no harm will come to them when there is a thunder storm, fireworks or you decide to vacuum the house. The key to solving these types of problems is in working with them outside of these times. Start with the cupboard. Stand beside the cupboard door (do not attempt to touch the door handle or open the door) and call her to you.

Make her sit beside it and praise lavishly (go ahead and give her a treat!). Once she is comfortable doing that, repeat the procedure but this time open the door ever so slightly. Once she is confident, go one step further and open the door. Finally, once you have each step down, you can pull the vacuum cleaner out. Don't try and do it all in one day—slow and steady!

As for the noise, a good way of going about this is to record the noise of the vacuum cleaner or get yourself one of those environmental CDs with a storm on it, then play it in the background at a very low volume at a time when PJ is relaxed and happy. It helps if you play her favourite game whilst it is on. If there is no response, slowly turn the volume up, resume play and so on and so forth. Again, don't try to do it all in one day—slow and steady. The whole process may take months and months, but stick with it. It will be worth it in the long run.

Editor's note: see Pet Reads section for the review of 'Sounds Scary' 2 CD set and manual

Canine Playtime

...Dog Daycare Service

Is your Dog -

- Lonely?
- Destructive?
- Energetic?

We work in small groups with various activities, supervised by experienced handlers in a secure environment, guaranteed to entertain your pooch.

Leichhardt based we service most of the "Inner West"

Call ROWENA ON 0437 592 005

"It's funny how dogs and cats know the inside of folks better than other folks do, isn't it?"

- Eleanor H. Porter