

Correcting Behavior Problems in Dogs

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Remember, nearly all common behaviors can be traced back to instinct. Barking, digging, marking, and chewing all served distinct purposes in the wild. Dogs become frustrated if their natural instincts are constantly suppressed. Rather than fighting these instincts or punishing the dog for doing what comes naturally, it's far more productive to find acceptable ways to satisfy these instincts. Games like fetch, tug, and chase address a dog's instinctual needs, as well as strengthen the bond between dog and owner. Play helps the dog expend excess energy, which is extremely important for appropriate behavior. In order to be well adjusted and happy, dogs need to play. If your dog displays unacceptable behavior, you should deal with it as soon as possible to prevent it from becoming a habit, especially if you're dealing with a puppy.

Pets Love — and Need — to Play

A number of scientific studies on human and animal social interactions stress the importance of play. Humans and our pets are unique in that we play our entire lives. The fact that humans and pets stay playful as adults is a significant part of what makes our relationship special. Just like people, dogs and cats need to relax and have fun in order to grow and thrive. Although play can be exciting and fun, we need to remember that our pets also need supervision. They need to learn the rules of play. We have a responsibility to make it clear to our pets, especially dogs, when it's time to play and when it's not. An excited dog can lose control, and lack of control can lead to aggression.

Dogs Need to Play

For dogs, play is an important part of that process. Interactive play can strengthen the bond between you and your pet.

Dogs have been around for millions of years, and for the vast majority of that time they lived in the wild. Like all wild animals, they had to fend for themselves. "The Pack" was their key to survival. Wild dogs hunted together in packs to overpower prey and protect each other from larger predators. Eventually, humans realized dogs could be trained to work at such tasks as herding and protecting livestock. Only recently have humans fully appreciated the many ways dogs add value to their lives — from protection to recreation to companionship. Today many dogs have moved inside the home. Their owners think of them as family members. And to the dog, the human family has become their pack.

In spite of recent domestication, the dog's basic instincts have not changed. Dogs are predators, scavengers, and opportunists. They are genetically programmed to hunt for their food. Counter surfing, trashcan scouring, dinner begging, garden digging, and furniture chewing are all outgrowths of an opportunistic scavenger taking advantage of its environment. Often these are considered behavioral problems when, in fact, they are just evidence that a dog is being a dog.

Nearly all common behaviors can be traced back to instinct. Barking, digging, marking, and chewing all served distinct purposes in the wild. When dogs attack and try to tear something apart, or violently shake a lifeless item, they are acting on their instincts to subdue prey in order to eat and survive. When a ball is thrown to a dog, what appears to be play is actually the natural instinct to chase.

Dogs become frustrated if their natural instincts are constantly suppressed. Rather than fighting these instincts or punishing the dog for doing what comes naturally, it's far more productive to find acceptable ways to satisfy

these instincts. Healthy play can influence our dogs in so many ways. Physical and mental development, emotions, and behavior can all be influenced by how your dog plays. Games like fetch, tug, and chase satisfy a dog's instinctual needs, as well as strengthen the bond between dog and owner. Play helps the dog expend excess energy, which is extremely important for appropriate behavior. In order to be well adjusted and happy, dogs need to play.

Play is imperative, because a bored dog will find something to do — and too often this means destructive chewing. This problem can be addressed easily by providing the dog with satisfying chew toys. For more than 35 years, dog owners have used KONGs to minimize inappropriate behaviors and keep their dogs occupied. KONGs are durable chew toys with an erratic bounce that appeals to a dog's natural chase instincts. Once the dog captures the KONG, the natural rubber can be chewed on for hours, satisfying the needs to chase as well as chew.

But not all dogs will automatically chew on a KONG. Many experts suggest stuffing it with food. Dogs are quickly drawn to what's inside and challenged as they figure out how to get the treats out. Treat-stuffed toys are a great way to get a dog's initial attention, and as they chew the toy, good habits are reinforced.

Basic Training for Dogs with KONG

KONG rubber chew toys can be used as easy and effective training tools.

With just one KONG, you have a reward, retrieval, and food-dispensing toy. KONG can be used as a training tool for almost any type of training — quiet times, crate training, recall, and retrieving all work better with KONG. Also, use it to reward and stimulate your dog and increase the bond between the two of you.

KONG can be used as a reward all by itself or lightly stuffed with treats when you're teaching your dog basic commands. A tightly stuffed KONG can be used as the ultimate reward at the end of a training session

Crate Training

Indoor crates are highly effective training tools and can provide a safe and quiet retreat for your dog.

When introducing your dog to a crate, make the crate as comfortable as possible with a soft bed or blanket. Start your dog's crate training by stuffing a KONG toy with a favorite treat. Let your dog see and smell the stuffed KONG, then place the KONG in the back of the crate leaving the door open. You can sit on the floor by the crate and praise your dog as she moves toward the KONG. Let your pup chew on the KONG in the crate to help her feel more comfortable. Repeat this until your dog is happy to settle in the crate on his or her own.

Never try to push, pull, or force your dog into the crate. Be patient and use your treat-stuffed KONGs to make the crate a positive, welcoming, and safe place for your dog.

As your dog becomes more comfortable inside the crate, start to close the door and leave it closed for short periods of time. During the early stages of training, don't open the crate when your dog is barking, crying or whining. Only open it when your dog quiets down. This will teach your dog that barking, crying or whining won't result in the door being opened.

Crates are great for housetraining, preventing destructive behavior, reducing separation anxiety, and transportation. Never use crates for punishment or excessive confinement, as this will only undo all the training the two of you have completed so far.

Contact your local dog-training professionals or clubs to further enhance your dog's training.

Chewing Problems

A classic source of dog-owner frustration is chewed-up shoes, books, furniture, etc. Chewing is a natural and beneficial behavior, and it plays a vital role in your dog's physical development — especially in puppies.

Like humans, dogs have two sets of teeth in their lives. The 28 baby teeth erupt through the gums between the third and sixth weeks of age. Puppies don't have to grind much food, so they do not have molars. Puppy teeth begin to shed and be replaced by permanent adult teeth at about four to five months of age. The teething period can be frustrating and painful; the puppy clamps his mouth on everything he can reach, from body parts to expensive sneakers. In an attempt to relieve the discomfort, our Puppy rubber toys are gentle for growing teeth and jaws and help promote entry of growing teeth while establishing healthy chewing habits.

Although there is some variation in breeds, most adult dogs have 42 teeth, with the molars coming in last, at about six to seven months. The order of tooth replacement is incisors first, then canines (fangs), and finally premolars. During this growth period, teeth and jaws are getting stronger, and dogs need toys that can keep up with that change. When these new adult teeth are fully set, dogs should move from a [Puppy KONG](#) to a [KONG Classic](#) or black [Extreme KONG](#) based on chewing behavior.

Since most puppies love to chew, it's important to teach your dog which items are acceptable to chew. Teach this lesson in a positive and fun way by introducing a KONG toy stuffed with treats; provide constant praise when your dog plays and chews on it rather than your favorite shoes. Remember to use a variety of KONG toys and treats to keep lessons fun and interesting and to always monitor how your dog is chewing until you're comfortable (it usually takes around two weeks to determine your dog's chewing temperament).

Separation Anxiety

Separation anxiety, the fear of isolation, can cause your dog to show undesirable behavior and stress. Common behavioral problems associated with separation anxiety include excessive barking and whining, property destruction, depression, or hyperactivity. These problems could be a reaction to the stress of being alone and the uncertainty of your return.

Many trainers use mock departures as an effective method for treating separation anxiety. Gradually adjust your dog to being alone by planning repeated, brief departures. Be sure to keep the first departures short, one or two minutes only, and slowly increase the duration of your departures as your dog gains confidence in your return.

Your dog will soon start to associate your picking up car keys or putting on shoes or your coat with you leaving. Pick up your keys and put on your shoes or coat often throughout the day, and your dog will soon stop associating these actions as a signal that you are about to leave.

Separation anxiety almost always occurs within the first 20 minutes after you leave a dog alone. Give a stuffed dog KONG to your dog about five minutes before you leave. Having a stuffed KONG to explore is an effective way of redirecting your dog's attention away from your leaving and will absorb your pet during this crucial time. Remember, the most anxious time for a dog is the 20-minute period after you leave — and keeping his attention focused on a KONG can really ease his anxiety.

Also, remember to give your dog a stuffed KONG during the day when you do not intend to leave the house — as this will prevent your pet from associating it solely with your leaving.

Unwanted Barking

Some canine behavior problems, such as house soiling, affect only the pet's owner. Excessive barking, on the other hand, can result in unhappy neighbors. Puppies bark to express themselves verbally and are entitled to a little expression. However, continual barking, for long periods of time, is a sign that your pet has a problem that requires attention.

Most problems associated with barking are due to attention seeking, boredom, or stress. A good remedy is regular exercise and providing toys, especially those stuffed with healthy treats. The more you can do to mentally and physically stimulate your dog, the better he or she will behave when you're away.

In some cases, barking problems, such as those caused by fear or aggression, may need to be referred to a professional trainer or behaviorist.

Most dogs need to learn to use a [KONG Classic](#) rubber chew toy. We recommend a phased approach to ensure that your dog knows how to enjoy all of the benefits of this popular toy.

Phase 1: Toy introduction: Begin by filling the hollow section of the KONG toy with treats that are easily dispensed. Try smaller kibble or treats that fall out easily. KONG Stuff'N Easy Treats or peanut butter applied near the large opening of the KONG toy also work great and will ensure your dog's understanding and success.

Phase 2: Maintain enrichment: After a week or two of easily emptied KONG toys, gradually increase the challenge by using larger treats or a combination of treats that are increasingly difficult to dislodge. Use your imagination or browse our Recipe Section for recommendations.

Phase 3: Advanced enrichment. Once your dog has mastered the phases above, try to add liquid, such as chicken broth, to your stuffed KONG and freeze for an even greater and longer-lasting challenge.

Expert Tips for Introducing Dogs to a New Baby

Having a new baby in your home is stressful for everyone — including your dog. Here are some insights for easing the transition.

- Never leave a small child alone with a dog, even if they are very familiar with each other. This is especially important if you have more than one dog, because a pack mentality could develop among the dogs. The baby's room should be off-limits to your dog.
- Children should be taught from a very young age that dogs must be treated respectfully. That means no hitting, tail pulling, or riding. No matter how docile your dog seems to be, all of these acts can aggravate a dog and lead to conflict.
- A common mistake new parents make is to put the dog outside or in another room to separate it from the baby. However, this causes conflict. Dogs want to be a part of the family in the same way they were before the baby arrived. Instead of keeping the dog completely away, create barriers with playpens and baby gates, so the entire family can be in the common areas of the home together.
- Closely supervise your dog around your new baby and provide calm, quiet praise when he or she behaves properly. This could be as simple as the dog calmly sniffing the baby's clothing or blanket or enjoying a toy in

the same room as the baby. You should praise this behavior with a soft voice and a gentle pat. By praising your dog, you are reinforcing that the baby is a positive thing. Dogs will quickly learn to repeat praised behavior.

- A new baby can be stressful. But remember that when your dog is around, it will pick up on your emotions and body language. So when your baby is crying, it might be a great time to put your dog in a crate or another room to remove it from a stressful situation. This will allow you to focus your attention on the needs of your baby.
- Before you bring your new baby home, have your dog checked by your vet to ensure there aren't any unknown issues, such as an injury which can make a dog more sensitive and aggressive. Consider getting your dog spayed or neutered, since this cuts down on aggression in dogs of both genders. Most dog bites come from unneutered dogs.
- Research shows that dog aggression decreases the more a dog is walked and exercised. This will also keep your dog healthier and is a great family activity that can eventually include your children.
- Although some dog breeds are statistically more likely to be aggressive than others, never assume that because you have a "friendlier" breed, caution needn't be taken when introducing your dog to your baby. Each dog is an individual, just like humans.

Expert Tips for Managing Aggression

Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist Karen B. London, PhD, uses play and KONG toys to treat aggression. Learn her tricks.

I regularly use play to treat aggression, and KONG toys are a big part of the success I have with these cases. Play is undervalued in the field of dog behavior, both as reinforcement and as a part of the treatment for behavioral issues. Once a dog knows how to play with and eat from a KONG toy, that set of skills can be applied in lots of ways to improving behavior — just like obedience skills can.

The advantages of using KONG toys when treating behavior problems are many. For example, KONGs are durable; there are lots of options in terms of shapes, sizes, and materials; they create a high motivation factor for dogs; and many dogs are already familiar with these toys. When play is incorporated into treatment plans, pet compliance is better. Many people are more willing and motivated to play with their dogs than to follow through with other types of treatment.

In some cases, play is part of a training program or part of relationship enhancement exercises. But in other cases, play forms the core of the treatment plan. The typical dog who benefits from a play-based treatment program with KONG toys is one who is high energy, high arousal, mouthy, young, already toy motivated, jumpy, in a household with children, and has not gotten into too much trouble with the mouth already. Generally, if dogs misbehave in situations of high arousal associated with objects and play, a treatment that incorporates play may be helpful.

Play with KONG toys helps dogs learn to inhibit themselves from exhibiting many problem behaviors, including jumping, holding onto objects, and being mouthy. Dogs can be redirected from problem behavior with play. For example, dogs that leap up at people or nip at people who enter and leave the house can be taught to go get a KONG in that same context in order to initiate a game of tug or fetch, depending on which KONG toy is used. By allowing dogs to perform an active behavior in an arousing situation, it is easier to get them to stop the undesirable behavior than if one tried to teach the same dogs to sit and stay or do some other behavior that requires high levels of impulse control.

In any case of fearfulness in which counter conditioning and desensitization is used to treat the problem, play should be considered as a way to change the dog's emotions about a feared object, person, or event. For example, in a dog that loves playing fetch with KONG toys and is afraid of strangers, it can be very effective to have every stranger the dog encounters throw a KONG toy for the dog to fetch. Dogs who are play-motivated often respond better to play than to treats, even if they are highly treat motivated — and the fears often lessen more quickly and thoroughly in response to counter conditioning with play than counter conditioning with treats.

KONGs are always a part of my “house-call bag” when working with dogs of all kinds, including those with serious behavior problems.

Thanks, KONG!

Karen B. London, PhD, CAAB, CPDT, is an expert on canine play and specializes in the evaluation and treatment of serious behavior problems in the domestic dog. She is the training columnist for The Bark Magazine and writes the Arizona Daily Sun's animal column, “The London Zoo.” London is on the Animal Behavior Society's Board of Professional Certification and is an adjunct faculty member in the Department of Biological Sciences at Northern Arizona University. She and Patricia B. McConnell, PhD, CAAB, have co-written four books, including Play Together, Stay Together: Happy and Healthy Play Between People and Dogs.

The “Wild Side” of Positive-Reinforcement Training

Learn how today's zoo professionals are using positive reinforcement training.

It's an exciting time to be a zookeeper. Today's zoo professionals are using their creative and behavioral talents to teach wild and potentially dangerous animals how to participate in their own care and ultimate survival. From daily body weights and exams to voluntary blood sampling, wild animals are learning to engage in cooperative behaviors (often without direct contact) that help ensure long-term health and well-being. These behavior-training advancements help create a safer, healthier, and more productive environment for animals and the people who care for them. But the real story is the source behind all of this success — the exclusive use of positive-reinforcement training.

It's probably no surprise to anyone that most zoo species are neither receptive to nor intimidated by the presence of humans. These simple statements of fact have helped to lay the foundation for today's widespread use of training through positive reinforcement only in zoos and aquariums. With countless examples, we now know that it's possible to shape reliable behaviors in any species using positive reinforcement only while foregoing the use of all forms of punishment and/or correction. The end result is a relationship of trust between animal and caregiver — one that's strong enough to build successful new behaviors and help transcend past behavior problems, including severe aggression.

Of course, one of the challenges to using positive reinforcement in a zoological setting (or in our homes for that matter) is finding safe, durable, and interesting activities and objects to engage a wild animal's mind and body, with and without a trainer present. Fortunately, the KONG Company has an array of products that help trainers provide their animals with positive reinforcement. The resulting mental and physical stimulation goes a long way toward teaching and maintaining calm and constructive behaviors. Plus, reinforcements that are variable in type, location, timing, and duration, such as the ones made possible by creative trainers and KONG toys, are essential to the reduction and outright prevention of unwanted and unhealthy behaviors, such as chewing, pacing, excessive vocalization and other forms of stereotyping. And if that weren't enough, training with only positive reinforcement is just plain fun for you and your animal — whatever species it may be.

Grey Stafford, PhD, has trained zoo and domestic animals for 20 years. As Director of Conservation for the Wildlife World Zoo & Aquarium near Phoenix, he promotes positive-reinforcement training on weekly TV appearances. His book, ZOOMility: Keeper Tales of Training With Positive Reinforcement (www.iReinforce.com), was recently featured on NBC's "The Tonight Show with Jay Leno."

Holiday Tips for Happy Pets

You know how stressful the holidays can be for people. Your canine family members often find the holidays even more stressful than you do.

Our dogs are creatures of habit. They're very comfortable with their daily routines, and holidays definitely tend to disrupt their sense of security. We have office parties, gift shopping, and other commitments that leave our dogs home alone. We also tend to have more houseguests and activities during the holidays. All of these things can overexcite or stress our canine creatures of habit. KONG has a few suggestions that can help ease the holiday stress for you and your dog.

First, it's important to plan ahead by stuffing several [Classic KONG](#) toys, or KONG treat dispensers like the [Wobbler](#), [Genius](#), [Stuff-a-Ball](#), or [Goodie Bone](#) with healthy treats or food. The pre-stuffed KONG toys will come in handy for many situations, allowing you to easily and quickly occupy your dog when you need to focus your attention elsewhere.

Household Gatherings and Guests

With KONG toys, you can reduce the inevitable canine stress associated with holiday dinners and visits. Begin by offering your dog a treat-filled KONG toy moments before a planned visit or activity to help expend energy and create calm. Once the doorbell rings, give your dog another treat-filled KONG to redirect that active energy to the toy and away from your guests. Offer KONGs throughout the visit or activity to occupy and entertain your dog.

Home Alone

For those times you're away from home during the holidays, give your dog one or more treat-filled KONG toys to reduce stress and loneliness. Typically, separation anxiety begins the moment you start preparing to leave and builds to higher levels just after your departure. This stress, if left unchecked, can lead to a variety of undesirable behaviors, like barking, soiling, and destructive chewing.

To help reduce departure stress and alone time, offer your dog a treat-stuffed KONG moments before you leave. This will help focus your dog's attention on the toy and away from your departure. Be sure to use a toy and stuffing recipe that will occupy your dog for 15 to 30 minutes. If you'll be gone for hours, multiple stuffed KONG toys will provide the answer. Add to the challenge but placing in a variety of locations around your home.

Important: you must be absolutely sure your dog is safe with a given toy before you leave him alone with it. Always supervise the use of new toys.

Holiday Preparations

Gift wrapping, holiday decorating, and meal preparation are all chores that demand our full attention. So of course this is when our dogs seem to want attention too. It's times like these that a stuffed KONG can come in handy. By offering a delicious, treat-stuffed KONG, your dog has something to do, which frees up time and attention for the task at hand.

Expert Tips for Weight Loss

Canine obesity is an all-too-common medical condition that can result in serious health implications for your dog.

The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) estimates that 35 percent of dogs are overweight or obese. A recent study conducted by Pfizer Animal Health found that veterinarians consider 47 percent of their canine patients overweight or obese — but only 17 percent of their pet parents felt the same. Why the difference? It could be denial or difficulty in recognizing the signs associated with being overweight or obese. Regardless, dog-owner perception and education is one of the underlying challenges in maintaining a healthy canine weight. This is a great reason for an annual veterinarian checkup.

Veterinarians highly recommend watching an animal's weight to prevent weight-associated complications and to make sure canine companions live longer, healthier lives. As with humans, weight loss can be achieved through dieting and exercise. Consult your veterinarian for a weight-loss program tailored specifically to your dog. Below are some of the weight-loss strategies your veterinarian may suggest:

- Adopt an exercise routine
- Reduce calories by limiting current food or changing to a diet food
- Eliminate table scraps
- Choose healthy, low-fat treats
- Eliminate free-feeding
- Feed two to four smaller servings throughout the day
- Consider the use of slow feeders and food-dispensing toys

The [KONG Wobbler](#) presents an excellent alternative to traditional bowl feeding and makes feeding the recommended two to four smaller servings fun and easy. By slowing down and extending the joy of mealtime, the Wobbler will keep hunger under control. It also prevents the unhealthy gulping and rapid eating that can lead to other digestive problems like bloat.

The [KONG Genius](#) line is named in honor of geniuses Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci; they are designed to stimulate a dog's curiosity and hold his or her attention. These toys are great for helping to combat boredom and separation anxiety. They can also be used as treat-dispensing toys on their own or in connection with other Genius toys for an increased challenge. Genius toys are great for puppies and adult dogs alike.