

Until the dog fully understands the meaning of a command (until he or she will respond approximately 90-95% of the time) he must be rewarded every time for responding. Once you are sure that the dog does fully understand, then food treats can be partially phased out. But this does not mean that treats are never given again! This would be like starting a new job, being paid whilst you are learning, but then not being given any wages at all once you know what to do! The likelihood is that you wouldn't stay in that job for very long! The answer is to give the dog 'variable rewards. This means that approximately 50-70% of the time he gets no more than a "Good dog", 20-30% of the time a small treat is given. e.g. a small piece of dried food or biscuit, but then 10-20% of the time he gets an extra special treat, e.g. a piece of cheese or sausage! The trick is to keep him guessing so that he never knows which reward is likely to be forthcoming!

House training

Allowing a dog to foul in a public place creates bad publicity for dog ownership, and is an offence punishable with a heavy fine.

Local bylaws may be quoted by local authorities but the Fouling of Land Act (1997) can be applied in *all* cases regardless of local law.

A good first step to avoiding problems is to train the dog to eliminate on command.

The dog can then be given the command to eliminate before a walk or in an acceptable location.

House training a puppy

This method applies just as well to an adult dog that has lost house training through senility or long term kennelling.

With pups the best time to start all training is the moment they arrive, and house training is no different.

Puppies tend to go to the toilet within 20 minutes of eating or waking up, so these are particular times that it may need to be taken outside.

Establish a regular feeding routine early on; take the puppy outside after meals or naps, and every 60-90 minutes until it is obvious that a pattern of toileting has developed.

When you go outside keep the puppy on a leash and do not react at all until he or she has eliminated.

You should then immediately praise the pup, give a food reward and play a game.

You should always keep it on a lead until it has urinated and/or defecated.

As soon as it has eliminated, you can let it off the lead as a reward. It will soon learn that the pup is only free to run about and play once it has been to the toilet. This will encourage it to eliminate as soon as possible.

Puppies will often 'learn' to prefer a certain type of surface to eliminate on. Many will have spent the first few weeks of life toileting on newspaper. This creates a preference that can be helpful when toilet training.

Leave some newspaper on the floor by the back door for the pup to toilet on in an emergency.

The size of the area covered in newspaper can be gradually reduced until the pup is going to the back door automatically when it needs to do its business. It can then be let out to go in the garden. While nobody is present to watch the puppy, it is best to keep it somewhere that can easily be cleaned.

Before a puppy passes urine or faeces, it will usually sniff the floor and circle before squatting down.

As soon as you see the pup start to do this, pick it up and put it outside or onto the newspaper. If it is too late and the pup finishes all or most of its business in the 'wrong' place do *not* react. Definitely don't tell him off and don't make a big fuss about the mess, just clean it up. But if the pup completes its elimination in the correct place, i.e. outside, immediately it has finished praise it and reward with a food treat and/or game.

If an accident happens do not smack the puppy, tell it off or rub its nose in the mess.

All of these can cause the puppy to be fearful and anxious and may make it secretive about where it goes to the toilet. A puppy that urinates in front of you is much easier to train than one that skulks off into a bedroom or hides behind the sofa and pees. Not only that, it is possible to upset a young dog so much that it will not toilet in front of the owner even on the leash. These dogs may refuse to relieve themselves on walks and then eliminate indoors in a concealed place where they feel safe!

Clean up any accidents with a 1:10 dilution of biological washing liquid in warm water and then rinse clean. A commercial biological deodoriser is also useful. The aim is to remove any smell that might make the dog think it is fine to come back and use the spot as a regular latrine. Don't use bleach or ammonia based disinfectant as these often produce a smell that is quite similar to decayed urine.

Elimination on command

Learn your dog's routine, and when it needs to go to the toilet.

Decide on a command such as "Be clean" or "Hurry up".

Take your dog out on a leash and behave in a disinterested manner, whilst keeping a close eye on what it is doing.

Watch for signs that the dog is about to urinate or defecate.

Dogs first sniff and then circle the spot where they intend to eliminate.

As soon as your dog does this, give the command you have chosen.

When it has finished give plenty of praise, a food treat and a boisterous game (off leash if this is safe).

Fairly quickly it will recognise the command to eliminate because there is such a profound contrast between your behaviour before and after.

This can then be used to get the dog to relieve itself before going on a walk.

House training cats

Most cats require very little by way of house-training as long as they are aware of a suitable place to eliminate. They will normally require a soft loose material such as soil, sand or cat litter into which to they can dig and deposit their waste. Cats can develop a strong preference as to what substrate or surface to use, so a new owner should use the same type of cat litter that the cat is used to. If an owner wishes to change to a different type of litter it should be introduced gradually by adding a little day by day mixed in with the old litter.

Cats may be put off by the smell of some deodorising or pine-based litters so these are best avoided unless the cat is used to them. Problems can also arise if the litter tray is not cleaned often enough, or if it is cleaned too thoroughly with strong smelling disinfectants. The best policy is to clean out any faeces and/or wet patches once or twice daily.

Positioning of the litter tray is also important. To a small kitten just one room can seem enormous especially in a new home. Therefore the litter tray needs to be easy to find. Cats prefer to keep eating, sleeping and toileting areas separate so they may be reluctant to use a litter tray that is positioned close to where they eat or sleep. A tray should also not be put in a place where the cat is likely to be disturbed such as by a doorway, the dog's bed etc.

Some cats may prefer to use a covered tray, but it is very important that these are cleaned frequently as strong odours can quickly build up inside making it very unpleasant for the cat.

Cats may prefer to have one place to pass faeces and one to pass urine, so it can be a good idea to provide two litter trays for one cat.

To train a cat to eliminate outside rather than using a litter tray

Make the change over slowly by gradually moving the tray nearer to an outside door, then outside the door.

Each day scatter some soiled litter onto an area of the garden that the owner doesn't mind the cat using.

At the same time a little soil from outside should be mixed in with the litter in the tray.

Cats that have just started to use an 'outside' loo can feel vulnerable outdoors and may occasionally revert to using an indoor litter tray until they feel more confident. So don't take away the indoor tray too soon or you may find that they have found another, not so suitable indoor toilet.

Behaviour problems

General concepts in treating behavioural problems

Many pet animals have behaviour problems, but far fewer are treated.

Why?

There are many reasons:

Owner guilt (was it our fault?) which may lead them to avoid mentioning the subject.

Lack of awareness that the problem can be treated.

Fear that euthanasia may be recommended.
Failure to recognise that there is a problem at all

It is part of the responsibility of the vet and vet nurse to make sure that owners have an opportunity to comfortably express concerns about their pet's behaviour without fear of judgement.
If the problem is beyond the expertise of those working at the practice then referral to a specialist in the field of companion animal behaviour should be discussed with the client.

Behaviour problems can arise for a variety of reasons but there are general categories that can be applied:

Normal behaviour misinterpreted by the owner:

The dog or cat is doing nothing unusual but the owner is not sufficiently well informed to form a correct interpretation. Normal behaviour between dogs is often misunderstood in this way because owners are not prepared for some of the rougher and more aggressive looking patterns of play and 'sizing up' that happens between dogs when they meet.

Normal behaviour inappropriately expressed:

The behaviour might be seen in the wrong context, or expressed in an excessively intense manner. The actions of the animal are still within the normal, functional range of behaviour for that species.

Barking is a common example; many dogs bark for attention, at other dogs, at passers by etc. Barking is normal, it is just that the context, intensity or persistence of the barking causes problems for the owner.

Another example is fear and the reactions it produces. Fear responses are, to a point normal and necessary for survival. But excessive fear responses, and fear related aggression can be a major problem for both pet and owner.

Spraying is a further example. Cats spray for a whole host of reasons, but it is the place that is sprayed that causes the owner a problem.

Abnormal behaviour:

This category is contentious but essentially the behaviour has no function for the normal animal and may be the expression of some organic abnormality.

Repetitive, functionless behaviour such as stereotypies would fit this category, as might episodic dyscontrol (rage syndrome) and hyperkinesia (physiological or 'true' hyperactivity). These are rare problems.

Medical disorder and behavioural problems.

Physical problems can often be detected through behavioural change before gross symptoms become apparent.

Most owners think of illness in terms of the animal's behaviour and so asking questions such as 'what has his behaviour been like recently' is an economical way to get information about drinking and eating habits as well as lameness, lethargy and other common signs of disease.

Pain, endocrine disorder and cardiopulmonary disease are often linked with changes in behaviour, and it is the behavioural changes that have the real impact on the relationship between pet and owner.

It is therefore a good idea to try to integrate questioning about behaviour into normal consulting room technique.

Medical disorders can be a common underlying factor in behavioural problems.

It is therefore essential for the welfare of the animal that any obvious organic disease is ruled out or treated *before* behaviour modification advice is given. Physical changes should be considered especially when a presenting behaviour problem is of sudden onset.

Legal issues

Behaviour problems may seem a nice safe area to experiment with, but the potential damage if something goes wrong can be immense.

Check with insurers whether nurses and practitioners are indemnified against liability in the case of a problem.

From the moment that a client has taken advice from a member of staff about a behaviour problem there is some liability on the part of that individual and the practice.
Make sure that you are confident about the risk you are taking.

Likewise, make sure that you refer only to people who have indemnity cover themselves, as well as adequate training.

Behaviourism is likely to become more and more regulated so keep up to date with who is or is not allowed to treat certain cases.

Treatment methods.

Firstly any underlying medical problems need to be resolved.

It is a waste of time, and a potential welfare issue, for an animal to be exposed to a potentially stressful and lengthy training programme when there is active disease that could be causing, contributing to or exacerbating the unwanted behaviour.

Drugs are rarely needed to treat behavioural problems, but if the problem is of an emotional origin (fears, phobias etc) or there is concern that there is a pattern of abnormal behaviour then therapy with psychopharmaceuticals may be considered.

Many of the drugs that might be used are unlicensed. Therefore careful consideration needs to be made before embarking upon drug therapy.

Drugs will often 'mask' a behaviour, so although they might appear to resolve the problem without concurrent behavioural modification methods they are rarely effective in the long run.

General methods in behaviour modification:

Extinction

When a particular behaviour ceases to be rewarded then it will gradually disappear.

This is called extinction.

If a dog that has always barked to get food is now ignored instead, eventually the barking will cease.

However, this can take a long time

It is better if an alternative behaviour is rewarded at the same time.

Attention seeking behaviour is often a problem for owners, but they often make the mistake of turning to the dog, pushing it away and saying 'NO' which rewards the dog with the attention it wants.

It is much better to show the dog that it is to be shunned and ignored instead.

The owner turns away folding their arms, making no eye contact and not touching or talking to the dog.

It is acceptable to say 'NO' loudly having broken eye contact with the dog, but not whilst looking at it.

The owner should be prepared to stand up or even leave the room if the dog persists.

At other times when the dog is calm and quiet the owner must attend to the dog; show attention, start a game etc. In this way the reward of attention is being given for calmness, and calm behaviour will increase as the attention seeking extinguishes.

Interactive punishment

This includes any punishment where the owner is seen to be involved.

Saying 'No' and smacking with a hand or rolled up newspaper could all be considered 'interactive' punishments.

The major problem with the use of interactive punishment is that the animal may associate the unpleasant experience with the approach of a hand or the sight of a rolled up newspaper rather than with its own actions. This can result in fear and aggression when the animal is handled or whenever it sees a rolled up newspaper or anything that looks similar.

Remote punishment

This is a form of punishment where the owner is seemingly (to the animal) not connected with the punishment. As long as the owner shows no reaction as the dog is punished the dog is not aware of the connection between the punishment and the owner. This works well because the dog does not learn to

misbehave only when the owner is not around. This is therefore a more effective method of punishment.

The punishment can be anything that startles the animal such as a thrown rattle-can containing pebbles or coins, a hidden water pistol, or a simple bang on the door. *The idea is to startle and distract the animal not to cause pain and/or distress.* The use of remote shock collars and anti-bark collars is not advisable because of the level of pain and distress they can cause which may even result in the animal becoming inappropriately fearful and/or aggressive towards people, objects or animals might be near by when it is punished.

Social exclusion

This is useful when a dog misbehaves because most of them would prefer to be around the owner wherever possible. Simply storming out of the room, shutting the door behind you and leaving the dog alone for 2 minutes is usually enough to achieve this.

(When using any attempts at punishment, don't forget that punishment is defined in terms of its results; if the behaviour persists then the dog has not been punished.)

Reinforcement

Positive and negative reinforcement have already been defined in this chapter.

Desensitisation.

The full volume sound of a firework might frighten a dog.

If the dog were repeatedly exposed to the same noise at a low volume which is very gradually increased over a number of days or weeks the dog would learn to tolerate the noise.

This is an example of desensitisation.

The same process can be used to desensitise a dog to a sight or sound that might trigger aggression (such as the ring of a doorbell or the presence of another dog).

Response substitution

Often a particular stimulus (a telephone ring for example) will trigger a particular behaviour.

The dog has learned to respond in that manner when it meets that stimulus.

If we can train a dog to respond in a completely different manner to the same stimulus this is called 'response substitution'.

Counter-conditioning

This is very similar to response substitution, but in this case the animal is taught a response that is in direct contradiction to the old response.

In effect the animal cannot do both and adopts the newly trained behaviour instead.

For example, a dog that becomes anxious when it hears a doorbell might be taught to play a game instead. The emotional response of happiness and play is incompatible with anxiety and replaces it.

Prevention of problems

Socialisation and Habituation

Many behaviour problems can be prevented through proper socialisation and habituation.

The 'socialisation period' is a time when a young animal is most 'sensitive' to gathering information about its environment and social relationships with its own and other species. During the main part of the socialisation period a young animal will tend to be quite inquisitive and exploratory. But as it grows up, fear and escape responses develop and it is more likely to be fearful of new things or situations (neophobia). The timing of the 'socialisation period' in dogs is around 3-12 weeks of age for dogs, (but this can vary considerably), and around 2-7 weeks of age for cats.

The environment during early life needs to be the same as the animal is likely to experience as an adult. The trouble is that human lives are filled with change and a dog or cat may not always be adequately prepared to cope.

It is likely that most owners will move house at least once during the pet's lifetime, many will start families or have grandchildren.