

He's Ruining my House!

Is your dog ruining your house? Does he chew things up? Does he “mess” in the house? All is not lost... he's acting like a completely normal dog. That is, a dog that hasn't been taught that people prefer he NOT do these things! As the human, it is up to you to manage him, manage the environment, and train him so that you can both lead happier - and safer - lives. Safer? You bet. The number one reason dogs are abandoned or taken to shelters (where they are almost certainly euthanized) is “behavior problems” that the owner allowed to develop. Hardly fair, is it?

So, what can you do so your dog has a better fate? First off, start with exercise. If your idea of a “good dog” is one that sleeps all day unless needed by you for brief entertainment, check into one of those new robot dogs! If you are willing to accept your pet's natural doggieness, then below is some advice that I hope helps.

Exercise

A tired dog is a “good” dog! Before leaving your dog for a prolonged absence in his crate or room, wear him out with some serious exercise. Long walks aren't good for a growing puppy's joints, but retrieving games, tug o' war, etc. are great and will provide super exercise. As soon as the dog is old enough (ask your vet), then you need to make walking your dog a part of your daily routine. Please be aware that this needs to happen EVERY DAY, SEVERAL TIMES A DAY, especially for hunting breeds! Most dogs need 60 minutes a day, although that can be broken in smaller walks (i.e. 30 mins in the morning, 30 mins in the evening). Longer excursions on weekends are great, but vigorous exercise must be provided every day. This is hugely important. Most dogs were bred for serious work which required stamina. Their needs for exercise are huge! Without serious aerobic exercise every day they vent that pent-up energy elsewhere... like your house. Lack of exercise also leads to boredom, which leads to mischief.

Management

Control your dog's access to things which he may damage - or may hurt him! When you can't pay attention to him, keep him safe in a comfy crate or in a safe room behind a puppy gate. Put all shoes, pillows, etc out of his reach. Provide him with plenty of fun things to chew on. You can make a great chew toy by taking a Kong toy or a sterilized bone and filling the middle with something delicious. Treats jammed in there, to be worked out one at a time, or the entire insides smeared with peanut butter or cheese spread can keep a puppy entertained & happy for hours! You can also buy a product such as the Buster Cube where treats or kibble can be worked out throughout the day. This kind of chew toy is mentally stimulating as well. Also a good idea is to just leave a couple of toys out for your dog. Too many become boring. You can have many different kinds - just rotate which ones you have out each day!

Interrupt Bad Behavior

Catch your dog in the act of getting into the trash? Then shout “ACK!” at him. This will startle him and interrupt the behavior. Then tell him what he should do (such as go lie down) or can chew on (such as a pig ear).

Training

A dog with obedience training is just going to be more responsive to you in general. The training itself also serves as a form of exercise - mental stimulation will tire a dog out, too! Best bet is to enroll in group classes at a local obedience school, but if you can't find one which uses only positive reinforcement methods, try the lessons on this Web site. The Clicker Teachers site (clickerteachers.net) can help you locate a clicker trainer in your area.

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*using positive methods to teach people how to teach their pets!