



Top 10 tips
for taking care of your pets



**THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES**

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Introduction

THANK YOU for downloading this e-book. We hope you'll enjoy this selection of articles we've carefully chosen for you, written by the animal care and veterinary experts at the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS). Though these articles are the most popular ones from our website, they represent just a small fraction devoted to the topic of pet care and companion animal issues. Please visit our website for more like these at humanesociety.org.

The animals we've chosen to share our homes and lives with require basic attention and care in order to live their best lives. As a pet owner, you take responsibility for providing them with access to nutritious food and clean water. You attend to their grooming needs and seek veterinary care when they fall ill. You enjoy enriching their lives with training and playtime activities.

Most responsible pet owners don't think twice about providing these things—but there are countless animals that never experience even the most basic of these necessities.

Dogs languishing in puppy mill breeding operations must endure confinement in filthy cages, often without access to fresh water or adequate food. Mother dogs are bred repeatedly and many are never let outdoors to breathe fresh air or to feel grass beneath their paws.

Unfortunately, such forms of extreme cruelty are not limited to puppy mills or animal hoarding situations. Cows, chickens and pigs in factory farms endure short, painful lives in extreme confinement for the sake of maximizing profits to the agricultural industry.

Wild animals—though allowed to live free—aren't always free from human exploitation. Lions, elephants and bears are hunted to wind up as wall trophies. Other wild animals are killed for their horns, fins or internal organs to be consumed as a delicacy or used in medicines of dubious effectiveness.

Together with our supporters, we are continually striving to end these abuses and more. We are encouraged by the amazing progress our dedicated efforts have achieved over the years towards bringing relief to suffering animals. This is a direct result of rescue operations and advocacy campaigns to create awareness and put laws in place to end such practices once and for all.

As an animal lover, we know you're outraged by the conditions facing voiceless animals around the globe. The good news is we are working tirelessly with the dedicated support of our generous donors to confront the worst cases of cruelty and neglect in order to give animals the respect they deserve.

We sincerely hope you'll consider [joining us](#) in the fight for all animals!

GET NEWS AND ACTION ALERTS

Stay up to date with [email](#) and [text message](#) alerts.



Where to get a puppy

When looking for a puppy, please skip pet stores and internet sites and consider a shelter or rescue first

ARE YOU GETTING A NEW DOG or thinking about it? We're so excited for you and we know you'll give your new companion a great, loving home.

Once you've decided you're ready for a dog, the next big decision is where to find this lifelong family member. You'll want to make sure to NOT get an animal from a [puppy mill](#) and that's not always easy to recognize.

Sadly, some places that seem like great puppy sources may not be, but if you follow our top puppy-buying tips, you'll be far more likely to secure a healthy, well-socialized dog who doesn't drain your emotions or your wallet.

CONSIDER ADOPTION FIRST

[Adopting](#) a dog who needs a home is one of the best things you'll ever do. Your local animal shelter or rescue organization can help you find the right match for your family. There are also breed-specific rescue groups for every breed of dog, including "designer" or "hybrids" like labradoodles and puggles. [The Shelter Pet Project](#) can help you find a great dog or puppy in your area!

FIND A RESPONSIBLE BREEDER AND VISIT THE PREMISES

[Responsible breeders](#) provide a loving and healthy environment for their canine companions, one that they will be proud to show you. You should never buy a puppy without seeing where the dog and their parents were raised and housed with your own eyes, no matter

WHERE TO GET A PUPPY

what papers the breeder has. Beware: AKC and other types of registration papers only tell you who a puppy's parents were, not how they were treated.

DON'T GET A PUPPY FROM A PET STORE

Despite [what they may tell you](#), most pet stores do sell puppy mill puppies. Unless the store is "[puppy-friendly](#)" by sourcing homeless pups from local animal shelters, you have to be very careful about a pet store's link to puppy mills.

DON'T BELIEVE PROMISES THAT PUPPIES ARE "HOME-RAISED" OR "FAMILY-RAISED"

Many puppy millers pose as small family breeders online and in newspaper and magazine ads. We have often helped local authorities in the rescue of puppy mill dogs. In almost all cases, the puppy mills sold puppies via the internet using legitimate-looking ads or websites that made it look like the dogs came from somewhere happy and beautiful—claims that couldn't have been further from the truth.

AVOID THE TEMPTATION TO "RESCUE" A PUPPY MILL DOG BY BUYING THEM

Unfortunately, that just opens up space for another puppy mill puppy and puts money into the pockets of the puppy mill industry. The money you spend goes right back to the puppy mill operator, ensuring they will continue breeding and treating dogs inhumanely. If you see someone keeping puppies in poor conditions, alert your local animal control authorities instead of buying the animal.

DO YOUR PART: PLEDGE TO HELP STOP PUPPY MILLS!

Choose [not to buy](#) your next pet from a pet store or internet site, and refuse to buy supplies from any pet store or internet site that sells puppies.

[READ THIS ARTICLE ONLINE →](#)



Why you should spay/neuter your pet

Safeguard your pet's health, help improve their behavior and save money

THE CHOICE to spay or neuter your pet may be one of the most important decisions you make impacting their long-term health—and your wallet!

YOUR PET'S HEALTH AND LONGEVITY

The average lifespan of spayed and neutered cats and dogs is demonstrably longer than the lifespan of those not. A University of Georgia study, based on the medical records of more than 70,000 animal patients, found that the life expectancy of neutered male dogs was 13.8% longer and that of spayed female dogs was 26.3% longer. The average age of death of intact dogs was 7.9 years versus a significantly older 9.4 years for altered dogs.

Another study, conducted by Banfield Pet Hospitals on a database of 2.2 million dogs and 460,000 cats reflected similar findings, concluding that neutered male dogs lived 18% longer and spayed female

dogs lived 23% longer. Spayed female cats in the study lived 39% longer and neutered male cats lived 62% longer.

The reduced lifespan of unaltered pets can, in part, be attributed to an increased urge to roam (exposing them to fights with other animals resulting in injuries and infections), to trauma from vehicle strikes and to other accidental mishaps.

A contributor to the increased longevity of altered pets is their reduced risk of certain types of cancers. Intact female cats and dogs have a greater chance of developing pyometra (a potentially fatal uterine infection) and uterine, mammary gland and other cancers of the reproductive system. Neutering male pets eliminates their risk of testicular cancer and results in lower rates of prostate cancer.

A handful of studies conducted at UC Davis may appear to challenge the health benefits of widespread spaying/neutering of companion

WHY YOU SHOULD SPAY/NEUTER YOUR PET

pets, by raising concerns that these surgeries may predispose some altered dogs to certain orthopedic conditions and cancers. As a result, they have caused some pet owners to question altering their pets at an early age or altering them at all. However, on closer examination, the results of these studies pertain specifically to male dogs of certain large breeds and their conclusions should not be generalized to other breeds of dogs, or other species, including cats.

These are the best general recommendations that can be drawn from a thorough analysis of research currently available:

- Owned cats should be altered before 5 months old.
- Owned female dogs should be spayed before 5 months old.
- Owned small breed male dogs should be neutered before 5 months old.
- Owned large breed male dogs who are house pets should be neutered after growth stops between 12 to 15 months old due to orthopedic concerns.
- Owned large breed male dogs who roam freely should be neutered before 5 months old due to the population concerns of unintended breeding.
- Shelter animals should be altered prior to adoption, as early as 6 weeks old.
- Community cats should be altered via [TNR](#) (trap-neuter-return) at any age after 6 weeks old.

CURB UNWANTED BEHAVIORS

Intact dogs are more prone to [urine-marking](#) than neutered dogs. Although urine-marking is usually associated with male dogs, females may do it too. Spaying or neutering your dog should reduce urine-marking and may even stop it altogether.

For cats, the [urge to spray](#) is extremely strong in those not altered, so the simplest solution is to alter by 5 months old before the problem arises. Neutering solves 90% of all marking issues, even in cats that have been doing it for a while. It can also minimize howling, the urge to roam and fighting with other males.

In both cats and dogs, the longer you wait, the greater the risk of the surgery not doing the trick because the animal has practiced the behavior for a longer period of time, thereby reinforcing the habit.

Other behavioral problems that can be alleviated by spay/neuter include:

- [Roaming](#), especially when females are in heat
- Excessive [barking](#) and mounting activity

While having your pets spayed/neutered can help curb undesirable behaviors, it will not change their fundamental personalities.

CUT COSTS

When you consider the potential long-term medical costs incurred for an unaltered pet, the savings afforded by spay/neuter are clear, especially given the plethora of [low-cost spay/neuter clinics](#) now available.

Caring for a pet with reproductive system cancer or pyometra can easily run thousands of dollars—five to 10 times as much as a routine spay or neuter surgery. In cases where intact dogs and cats may fight, treatment of their related injuries can also result in high veterinary costs.

SPAY AND NEUTER PET RABBITS

Another aspect of being conscientious about pet overpopulation is to spay and neuter pet rabbits. Rabbits reproduce faster than dogs and cats and are now the #2 species surrendered to some shelters. Neutering male rabbits can also reduce hormone-driven behaviors such as lunging, mounting, spraying and boxing.

And as with dogs and cats, spayed female rabbits are less likely to get ovarian, mammary and uterine cancers which can be prevalent in mature intact females.

SPREAD THE WORD

By spaying or neutering your pet, you can help protect them against certain illnesses, help address unwanted behaviors, save money and save lives by reducing overpopulation. Contact your veterinarian or your local low-cost spay/neuter clinic to discuss and/or schedule your pet's appointment and encourage your family and friends to do the same. If your community does not have affordable, accessible spay/neuter and wellness services available, advocate for this funding so that all pet owners have local access to quality medical care for their pets.

[READ THIS ARTICLE ONLINE →](#)



Positive reinforcement training

Just say “yes” to training your dog with treats and praise

REMEMBER HOW HAPPY YOU WERE if your parents gave you a dollar for every A on your report card? They made you want to do it again, right? That’s positive reinforcement.

Dogs don’t care about money. They care about praise—and food. Positive reinforcement training uses a reward (treats, praise, toys, anything the dog finds rewarding) for desired behaviors. Because the reward makes them more likely to repeat the behavior, positive reinforcement is one of your most powerful tools for shaping or changing your dog’s behavior.

Rewarding your dog for good behavior sounds pretty simple and it is! But to practice the technique effectively, you need to follow some basic guidelines.

TIMING IS EVERYTHING

Correct timing is essential when using positive reinforcement. The reward must occur immediately (within seconds) or your pet may not associate it with the proper action. For example, if you have your dog sit but reward them after they’ve stood back up, they’ll think they’re being rewarded for standing.

KEEP IT SHORT

Dogs don’t understand sentences. “Daisy, I want you to be a good girl and sit for me now” will likely earn you a blank stare. In fact, dogs learn first from our body language, so work on luring your dog into a “sit” or “down” first before asking them with a word. Once they have figured out the behavior consistently, start adding the word “sit” or “down” but try not to repeat it and say it in a calm voice. Keep commands short and uncomplicated.

The most commonly used dog commands are:

- watch (eyes on me)
- sit
- stay
- down (lie down)
- off (get off of me, someone else, the furniture)
- up (stand up)
- come (to me)

POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT TRAINING

- heel (walk close to my side)
- leave it (don't touch or pick up something from the ground)

CONSISTENCY IS KEY

Everyone in the family should use the same commands, otherwise, your dog may get confused. It might help to post a list of commands where everyone can become familiar with them.

Consistency also means always rewarding the desired behavior and never rewarding undesired behavior.

WHEN TO USE POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT

The good

Positive reinforcement is great for teaching your dog commands and it's also a good way of reinforcing good behavior. You may have your dog sit:

- before letting them outside (which helps prevent door-darting)
- before petting them (which helps prevent jumping on people)
- before feeding them (which helps teach good meal time manners)

Give them a pat or a "good dog" for lying quietly by your feet or slip a treat into a Kong®-type toy when they chew that instead of your shoe.

The bad

Be careful that you don't inadvertently use positive reinforcement to reward unwanted behaviors. For example, if you let your dog outside every time they bark at a noise in the neighborhood, you're giving a reward (access to the yard) for behavior you want to discourage.

SHAPING BEHAVIOR

It can take time for your dog to learn certain behaviors. You may need to use a technique called "shaping," which means reinforcing something close to the desired response and then gradually requiring more from your dog before they get a treat.

For example, if you're teaching your dog to "shake," you may initially reward them for lifting a paw off the ground, then for lifting it higher, then for touching your hand, then for letting you hold their paw and finally, for actually "shaking hands" with you.

TYPES OF REWARDS

Positive reinforcement can include food treats, praise, petting or a favorite toy/game. Since most dogs are highly food-motivated, food treats work especially well for training.

- A treat should be enticing and irresistible to your pet. Experiment a bit to see which treats work best.
- A treat should be enticing and irresistible to your pet. Experiment a bit to see which treats work best.
- It should be a very small (pea-sized or even smaller for little dogs), soft piece of food, so that they will immediately gulp it down and look to you for more. Don't give your dog something they have to chew or that breaks into bits and falls on the floor.
- Keep a variety of treats handy so your dog won't become bored getting the same treat every time.
- Each time you use a food reward, you should couple it with a verbal reward (praise). Say something like "yes" or "good dog" in an enthusiastic tone of voice. Then give your dog a treat.

If your dog isn't as motivated by food treats, a toy, petting or brief play can also be very effective rewards.

WHEN TO GIVE TREATS

When your pet is learning a new behavior, reward them every time they demonstrate that behavior. This is called continuous reinforcement.

Once your pet has reliably learned the behavior, you want to switch to intermittent reinforcement, in which you continue with praise, but gradually reduce the number of times they receive a treat for doing the desired behavior.

- At first, reward with a treat four out of every five times they do the behavior. Over time, reward three out of five times, and so on, until you're only rewarding occasionally. But don't decrease the rewards too quickly! You don't want your dog to become frustrated or confused.
- Continue to praise every time—although once your dog has learned the behavior, your praise can become less excited.
- Use a variable schedule of reinforcement so that they don't catch on that they only have to respond every other time. Your pet will soon learn that if they keep responding, eventually they'll get what they want—your praise and an occasional treat.

By understanding positive reinforcement, you'll see that you're not forever bound to carry a pocketful of goodies. Your dog will soon be working for your verbal praise, because they want to please you and know that, occasionally, they'll get a treat too.

[READ THIS ARTICLE ONLINE →](#)



Crate training 101

CRATE TRAINING takes advantage of your dog's natural instincts to seek out a comfortable, quiet and safe place when the environment around them becomes too loud or overwhelming. It's also an important tool in preventing dogs from chewing on items in the home or during housetraining.

The primary use for a crate is housetraining, because dogs don't like to soil their dens. The crate can limit access to the rest of the house while they learn other rules, like not to chew on furniture. Crates are also a safe way to transport your dog in the car.

CRATING CAUTION

A crate is not a magical solution to common canine behavior. If not used correctly, a dog can feel trapped and frustrated.

- Never use the crate as a punishment. Your dog will come to fear it and refuse to enter.
- Don't leave your dog in the crate too long. A dog who's crated all day and night doesn't get enough exercise or human interaction and can become depressed or anxious. You may have to change your schedule, hire a pet sitter or take your dog to a daycare facility to reduce the amount of time they spend in their crate each day.
- Puppies under six months of age shouldn't stay in a crate for more than three or four hours at a time. They can't control their bladders or bowels for that long. The same goes for adult dogs being housetrained.
- Crate your dog until they are able to be alone in the house without accidents or destructive habits. You can graduate your dog from a crate to an enclosed area of your home, like your kitchen, before giving them access to the full house when you're away. The crate should always have a comfortable bed and the door left open when you're home so your dog can enter it when they need a safe space.

A crate may be your dog's den, but just as you would not spend your entire life in one room of your home, your dog should not spend most of their time in their crate.

Can you imagine your dog spending years in a cage? Help us [stop puppy mills](#).

CRATE SELECTION

Several types of crates are available:

- Plastic (often called “flight kennels”)
- Fabric on a collapsible, rigid frame
- Collapsible, metal pens

Crates come in different sizes and can be purchased at most pet supply stores or pet supply catalogs.

Your dog's crate should be just large enough for them to stand up and turn around in. If your dog is still growing, choose a crate size that will accommodate their adult size. Block off the excess crate space so your dog can't eliminate at one end and retreat to the other. Your local animal shelter may rent out crates. By renting, you can trade up to the appropriate size for your puppy until they reach adult size, when you can invest in a permanent crate.

THE TRAINING PROCESS

Crate training can take days or weeks, depending on your dog's age, temperament and past experiences. It's important to keep two things in mind while crate training: The crate should always be associated with something pleasant and training should take place in a series of small steps. Don't go too fast.

Step 1: Introduce your dog to the crate

Place the crate in an area of your house where the family spends a lot of time, such as the family room. Put a soft blanket or towel in the crate. Take the door off and let the dog explore the crate at their leisure. Some dogs will be naturally curious and start sleeping in the crate right away. If yours isn't one of them:

- Bring them over to the crate and talk to them in a happy tone of voice. Make sure the crate door is open and secured so that it won't hit your dog and frighten them.
- Encourage your dog to enter the crate by dropping some small food treats nearby, then just inside the door, and finally, all the way inside the crate. If they refuse to go all the way in at first, that's OK; don't force them to enter.

- Continue tossing treats into the crate until your dog will walk calmly all the way into the crate to get the food. If they aren't interested in treats, try tossing a favorite toy in the crate. This step may take a few minutes or as long as several days.

Step 2: Feed your dog meals in the crate

After introducing your dog to the crate, begin feeding them their regular meals near the crate. This will create a pleasant association with the crate.

- If your dog is readily entering the crate when you begin Step 2, place the food dish all the way at the back of the crate.
- If they remain reluctant to enter, put the dish only as far inside as they will readily go without becoming fearful or anxious. Each time you feed them, place the dish a little further back in the crate.
- Once your dog is standing comfortably in the crate to eat their meal, you can close the door while they're eating. The first time you do this, open the door as soon as they finish their meal. With each successive feeding, leave the door closed a few minutes longer, until they're staying in the crate for 10 minutes or so after eating.
- If they begin to whine to be let out, you may have increased the length of time too quickly. Next time, try leaving them in the crate for a shorter time period. If they do whine or cry in the crate, don't let them out until they stop. Otherwise, they'll learn that the way to get out of the crate is to whine, so they'll keep doing it.

Step 3: Practice with longer crating periods

After your dog is eating their regular meals in the crate with no sign of fear or anxiety, you can confine them there for short time periods while you're home.

- Call them over to the crate and give them a treat.
- Give them a command to enter, such as “crate.” Encourage them by pointing to the inside of the crate with a treat in your hand.
- After your dog enters the crate, praise them, give them the treat and close the door.
- Sit quietly near the crate for five to 10 minutes and then go into another room for a few minutes. Return, sit quietly again for a short time and then let them out.
- Repeat this process several times a day, gradually increasing

the length of time you leave them in the crate and the length of time you're out of sight.

- Once your dog will stay quietly in the crate for about 30 minutes with you mostly out of sight, you can begin leaving them crated when you're gone for short time periods and/or letting them sleep there at night. This may take several days or weeks.

Step 4, Part A: Crate your dog when you leave

After your dog can spend about 30 minutes in the crate without becoming anxious or afraid, you can begin leaving them crated for short periods when you leave the house.

- Put them in the crate using your regular command and a treat. You might also want to leave them with a few [safe toys](#) in the crate.
- Vary the moment during your “getting ready to leave” routine that you put your dog in the crate. Although they shouldn't be crated for a long time before you leave, you can crate them anywhere from five to 20 minutes prior to leaving.
- Don't make your departures emotional and prolonged—they should be matter-of-fact. Praise your dog briefly, give them a treat for entering the crate and then leave quietly.

When you return home, don't reward your dog for excited behavior by responding to them in an enthusiastic way. Keep arrivals low-key to avoid increasing their anxiety over when you will return. Continue to crate your dog for short periods from time to time when you're home so they don't associate crating with being left alone.

Step 4, Part B: Crate your dog at night

Put your dog in the crate using your regular command and a treat. Initially, it may be a good idea to put the crate in your bedroom or nearby in a hallway, especially if you have a puppy. Puppies often need to go outside to eliminate during the night and you'll want to be able to hear your puppy when they whine to be let outside. Older

dogs should also initially be kept nearby so they don't associate the crate with social isolation.

Once your dog is sleeping comfortably through the night with the crate near you, you can begin to gradually move it to the location you prefer, although time spent with your dog—even sleep time—is a chance to strengthen the bond between you and your pet.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS

Whining: If your dog whines or cries while in the crate at night, it may be difficult to decide whether they're whining to be let out of the crate, or whether they need to be let outside to eliminate. If you've followed the training procedures outlined above, then your dog hasn't been rewarded for whining in the past by being released from their crate. If that is the case, try to ignore the whining. If your dog is just testing you, they'll probably stop whining soon. Yelling at them or pounding on the crate will only make things worse.

If the whining continues after you've ignored them for several minutes, use the phrase they associate with going outside to eliminate. If they respond and become excited, take them outside. This should be a trip with a purpose, not play time. If you're convinced that your dog doesn't need to eliminate, the best response is to ignore them until they stop whining. Don't give in; if you do, you'll teach your dog to whine loud and long to get what they want. If you've progressed gradually through the training steps and haven't done too much too fast, you'll be less likely to encounter this problem. If the problem becomes unmanageable, you may need to start the crate training process over again.

Separation anxiety: Attempting to use the crate as a remedy for separation anxiety won't solve the problem. A crate may prevent your dog from being destructive, but they may get injured in an attempt to escape. Separation anxiety problems can only be resolved with counterconditioning and desensitization procedures. You may want to consult a professional animal-behavior specialist for help.

[READ THIS ARTICLE ONLINE →](#)



Understanding feline language

*You and your cat might speak different languages,
but you can still communicate with each other*

IMPORTANT CLUES such as the look in your cat's eyes, the tone of their "voice," the position of their ears and even the motion of their tail can reveal their feelings and intentions. You can learn to read these signals so you'll get a good idea of what's on your cat's mind.

VOCALIZING

You'll learn a lot when you can interpret your cat's wide vocabulary of chirps and meows. They'll tell you when they're hungry, when they're feeling affectionate and if they're feeling threatened or in pain.

- **Meowing** is all-purpose; your cat may be using "meow" as a greeting, a command, an objection or an announcement. Some people have observed their cats walking around the house meowing to themselves.
- **Chirps and trills** are how a mother cat tells their kittens to follow them. Aimed at you, it probably means your cat wants you to follow them, usually to their food bowl. If you have more than one cat, you'll often hear them converse with each other this way.
- **Purring** is usually a sign of contentment. Cats purr whenever they're happy, even while they're eating. Sometimes, however, a cat may purr when they're anxious or sick, using their purr to comfort themselves, like a child sucking their thumb.
- **Growling, hissing or spitting** indicates a cat who is annoyed, frightened, angry or aggressive. Leave this cat alone.
- **A yowl or howl** (they sound like loud, drawn-out meows) tells you your cat is in some kind of distress—stuck in a closet, looking for you or in pain. Find your cat if they're making this

UNDERSTANDING FELINE LANGUAGE

noise. However, in unaltered cats, these sounds are part of mating behavior. If your cat is elderly, they may howl because they're disoriented, especially if suffering from a cognitive disorder, such as dementia.

- **Chattering, chittering or twittering** are the noises your cat makes when they're sitting in the window watching birds or squirrels. It usually translates to excitement ... or they may be contemplating snack time.

BODY LANGUAGE

Does your cat arch their back up to meet your hand when you pet them? This means they're enjoying this contact with you. Do they shrink away under your slightest touch? Save the petting for later; they're not interested right now.

Pay attention to your cat's eyes, ears, body and tail—they're all telling you something. Here are some basic (though sometimes contradictory) clues:

Ears

- Forward: Alert, interested or happy
- Backward, sideways, flat ("airplane ears"): Irritable, angry or frightened
- Swiveling: Attentive and listening to every little sound

Eyes

- Pupils constricted: Offensively aggressive, but possibly content
- Pupils dilated (large): Nervous or submissive (if somewhat dilated), defensively aggressive (if fully dilated), but possibly playful

Tail

- Erect, fur flat: Alert, inquisitive or happy
- Fur standing up: Angry or frightened
- Held very low or tucked between legs: Insecure or anxious
- Thrashing back and forth: Agitated; the faster the tail, the angrier the cat
- Straight up, quivering: Excited, really happy or, if your cat hasn't been neutered or spayed, they could be getting ready to spray something

Body

- Back arched, fur standing up: Frightened or angry
- Back arched, fur flat: Welcoming your touch
- Lying on back, purring: Very relaxed
- Lying on back, growling: Upset and ready to strike

Rubbing

When your cat rubs their chin and body against you, they're telling you they love you, right? Well, sort of. What they're really doing is marking their territory. You'll notice that they also rub the chair, the door, their toys and everything in sight. They're telling everyone that this is their stuff, including you.

Kneading

This is sometimes called "making biscuits," because the cat works their paws on a soft surface as if they're kneading bread dough. It's a leftover behavior from nursing, when they massaged their mother's teats to make milk flow. Your cat does this when they are really happy.

The Flehmen response

Have you noticed times when your cat—perhaps while sniffing your shoe—lifts their head, opens their mouth slightly, curls back their lips and squints their eyes? They're not making a statement about how your shoe smells, they're gathering more information.

Your cat's sense of smell is so essential to them that they actually have an extra olfactory organ that very few other creatures have, the Jacobson's organ. It's located on the roof of their mouth behind their front teeth and is connected to the nasal cavity.

When your cat gets a whiff of something really fascinating, they open their mouth and inhale so that the scent molecules flow over the Jacobson's organ. This intensifies the odor and provides more information about the object they're sniffing.

A KEY TO YOUR CAT'S MOODS

Wondering if your cat is happy, meditating or having a bad day? Here's are some tips:

- **Content:** Sitting or lying down, eyes half closed, pupils narrowed, tail mostly still, ears forward and purring—a really happy cat will often knead on a soft surface.

UNDERSTANDING FELINE LANGUAGE

- **Playful:** Ears forward, tail up, whiskers forward and pupils somewhat dilated—playing is hunting behavior; your cat may stalk their prey (a toy, a housemate or you), then crouch down with their rear end slightly raised. A little wiggle of the butt, then ... pounce! Your cat will grab their prey, bite it, wrestle it the floor and kick it with their hind feet.
- **Irritated or over-stimulated:** Pupils dilated, ears turned back and tail twitching or waving—your cat may growl or put their teeth on you as a warning to cease and desist. Intense play can quickly turn into over-stimulation in some cats, resulting in biting and scratching.
- **Nervous or anxious:** Ears sideways or back, pupils dilated and tail low or tucked between legs—your cat may slink through the house close to the floor, looking for some where to hide. They may turn their face to the wall to shut the world out.
- **Frightened or startled:** Think Halloween cat—ears back and flat against their head, whiskers back, back arched, fur standing on end and tail erect or low. They may yowl, growl, hiss and spit.
- **Defensive:** Crouched, ears flattened, whiskers back, tail between their legs or wrapped around their body and pupils dilated—they may meow loudly, growl, hiss and spit.
- **Angry, aggressive:** Ears back, pupils very constricted and their tail may be up or down with the fur standing on end—an aggressive cat will stare down another cat and growl or yowl until the other cat gives way. Cats don't really want to fight; they prefer standoffs, but this can progress to fighting if one of the cats doesn't back down.

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How to get your dog to stop barking

Six ways to control your dog's barking

HERE'S A LIST OF SIX TECHNIQUES that can help stop your dog from barking. While all can be successful, you shouldn't expect miraculous results overnight. The longer your dog has been practicing the barking behavior, the longer it will take for them to change their ways.

Some of these training techniques require you to have an idea as to why your dog barks.

Always remember to keep these tips in mind while training:

- Don't yell at your dog to be quiet—it just sounds like you're barking along with them.
- Keep your training sessions positive and upbeat.
- Be consistent so you don't confuse your dog. Everyone in your family must apply the training methods every time your dog barks inappropriately. You can't let your dog get away with inappropriate barking some times and not others.

REMOVE THE MOTIVATION

Your dog gets some kind of reward when they bark. Otherwise, they wouldn't do it. Figure out what they get out of barking and remove it. Don't give your dog the opportunity to continue the barking behavior.

Example: *Barking at passersby*

- If they bark at people or animals passing by the living room window, manage the behavior by closing the curtains or putting your dog in another room.
- If they bark at passersby when in the yard, bring them into the house. Never leave your dog outside unsupervised all day and night.

IGNORE THE BARKING

If you believe your dog is barking to get your attention, ignore them for as long as it takes them to stop. Don't talk to them, don't touch them, don't even look at them; your attention only rewards them for

HOW TO GET YOUR DOG TO STOP BARKING

being noisy. When they finally quiet, even to take a breath, reward them with a treat.

To be successful with this method, you must be patient. If they bark for an hour and you finally get so frustrated that you yell at them to be quiet, the next time they'll probably bark for an hour and a half. They learn that if they just bark long enough, you'll give them attention.

Example: *Barking when confined*

- When you put your dog in their crate or in a gated room, turn your back and ignore them.
- Once they stop barking, turn around, praise them and give a treat.
- As they catch on that being quiet gets them a treat, lengthen the amount of time they must remain quiet before being rewarded.
- Remember to start small by rewarding them for being quiet for just a few seconds, then working up to longer periods of quiet.
- Keep it fun by varying the amount of time. Sometimes reward them after five seconds, then 12 seconds, then three seconds, then 20 seconds and so on.

DESENSITIZE YOUR DOG TO THE STIMULUS

Gradually get your dog accustomed to whatever is causing them to bark. Start with the stimulus (the thing that makes them bark) at a distance. It must be far enough away that they don't bark when they see it. Feed them lots of good treats. Move the stimulus a little closer (perhaps as little as a few inches or a few feet to start) and feed treats. If the stimulus moves out of sight, stop giving your dog treats. You want your dog to learn that the appearance of the stimulus leads to good things (treats)!

Example: *Barking at other dogs*

- Have a friend with a dog stand out of sight or far enough away so your dog won't bark at the other dog.

- As your friend and their dog come into view, start feeding your dog treats.
- Stop feeding treats as soon as your friend and their dog disappear from view.
- Repeat the process multiple times.
- Remember not to try to progress too quickly as it may take days or weeks before your dog can pay attention to you and the treats without barking at the other dog.

ASK YOUR DOG FOR AN INCOMPATIBLE BEHAVIOR

When your dog starts barking, ask them to do something that's incompatible with barking. Teaching your dog to react to barking stimuli with something that inhibits them from barking, such as lying down on their bed.

Example: *Someone at the door*

- Toss a treat on their bed and tell them to "go to your bed."
- When they're reliably going to their bed to earn a treat, up the ante by opening the door while they're on their bed. If they get up, close the door immediately.
- Repeat until they stay in bed while the door opens.
- Then increase the difficulty by having someone ring the doorbell while your dog is in bed. Reward them if they stay in place.

KEEP YOUR DOG TIRED

Make sure your dog is getting sufficient physical and mental exercise every day. A tired dog is a good dog and one who is less likely to bark from boredom or frustration. Depending on their breed, age and health, your dog may require several long walks as well as a good game of chasing the ball and playing with some [interactive toys](#).

CONTACT A CERTIFIED PROFESSIONAL DOG TRAINER

If you believe your dog is barking reactively to strangers, family members or other dogs, or if the above tips prove unsuccessful, consider reaching out to a [certified professional dog trainer](#) for help.

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What to do if your cat is marking territory

YOUR CAT isn't that far removed from their wild roots. They feel an instinctive urge to stake their claim by leaving their scent. While most territory marking is done through innocent rubbing or scratching, issues with urinating can also arise.

But don't worry, you can teach your cat to stop using urine to mark their territory!

THE IMPORTANCE OF SCENT

Scent is the primary way that cats communicate. For example, when one cat comes home from the vet, the other cats in the household may treat them like a stranger at first, based on their smell. They'll have to get a good sniffing before they're part of the family again.

Since cats can't be in two places at once to monitor their territory, they have many scent-based ways to leave their calling card.

Marking by rubbing

Felines have scent glands on their cheeks, paws and flanks and when

they rub against something—a door, a chair, you—they put their own personal scent on that object. This leaves the message for other cats that they've been there and laid claim. Rubbing against you is a way of marking you as theirs telling other cats to back off.

In a multi-cat household, all this rubbing helps to establish territories (at least temporarily) and to create bonds between the cats. When two cats in the house meet up, they'll sniff each other and one will start rubbing and maybe even grooming the other. This helps to ease tension between them.

Marking by scratching

When your cat [scratches something](#), they're doing more than sharpening their claws; they're leaving their scent as well.

Cats have scent glands on the pads of their feet and scratching is another way cats mark territory. Don't punish your cat for doing what comes naturally—just train them to use a scratching post and leave the furniture alone.

WHAT TO DO IF YOUR CAT IS MARKING TERRITORY

Urine-marking takes two forms:

- Spraying urine on vertical surfaces
- Urinating on horizontal surfaces

Spraying is when a cat backs up to a vertical surface with their tail erect and squirts urine. Their tail often quivers while they're spraying. Regular urinating is when they squat to pee on the furniture, the floor, things lying on the floor or any other horizontal surface. Both males and females can (and do) spray and squat. Marking with urine is not a litter box issue.

WHY YOUR CAT IS URINE-MARKING

There are several possible reasons your cat is urine-marking:

Introducing new pets to the home

If you are considering adopting a new cat or dog or other pet, be sure to give your resident cat plenty of time to adjust. The newly adopted pet should have a safe room to adjust to the home which allows your resident cat time to get to know them through a door or baby gate. Don't require your resident cat to share a litter box with a new cat.

Medical issues

Medical problems can be another cause of urine-marking. Particularly with male cats, a urinary tract infection (or much worse, a blockage) may be at fault if your cat suddenly stops using the litter box or spends a lot of time trying to urinate and licking their genitals. Some cats will even urinate and cry right in front of you or try to urinate in the bathtub or sink to let you know something's wrong.

Mating behavior

The urge to spray is extremely strong in cats who have not been spayed or neutered, so the simplest solution is to get that taken care of by five months of age, before there's even a problem.

If you've adopted an unneutered adult cat, get them fixed as soon as possible. Neutering solves most marking issues, even in cats who have been doing it for a while. However, the longer you wait, the greater the risk that marking behavior will be ingrained.

Stress

Cats are creatures of habit and many react badly to even the slightest changes in their environment. This can include everything from a new pet or baby in the house, to a caretaker's absence, a strange cat in the backyard and other environmental factors we don't fully notice or understand.

Marking territory with urine is your cat's way of dealing with stress. They feel anxious and are trying to relieve their anxiety by staking out

their boundaries. Leaving their urine scent is the most emphatic way to say, "I'm stressed."

If you see signs of medical problems, take your cat to the vet immediately. Urinary tract problems are not only painful, they can be fatal. A cat whose urinary tract is blocked can die in hours or suffer irreversible organ damage from the buildup of toxins in their system. **Urinary tract problems don't clear up by themselves and require urgent attention.**

WAYS TO SOLVE MARKING

Finding the culprit

Isolate one cat at a time to see if the inappropriate behavior stops while they're in isolation. This method isn't foolproof, however, because if the culprit's behavior is stress-induced, it may not occur if isolation has removed them from the source of stress.

Another method is adding food-safe fluorescent dye to the cats' food (one cat at a time). The dye will glow in the cat's urine when a black light is held over it. You have your culprit.

Now that we know who it is, what to do about it?

Resolving your cat's stress is critical and requires time and plenty of patience and understanding from you. We have lots of tips to help you get your cat through their crisis. Here are a few:

- Clean soiled areas thoroughly. Don't use strong-smelling cleaners, because they may cause your pet to "over-mark" the spot.
- Make previously soiled areas inaccessible or unattractive. If this isn't possible, try to change the significance of those areas to your pet. Feed, treat and play with your pet in the areas they're inclined to mark.
- Keep objects likely to cause marking out of reach. You should place items such as guests' belongings and new purchases in a closet or cabinet.
- Restrict your pet's access to doors and windows through which they can observe animals outside.
- A short course of anti-anxiety medication may help if your cat is feeling anxious during behavior modification. Speak to your veterinarian if your cat is acting anxiously.
- Use a product like Feliway® to inhibit your cat's spraying.

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How to remove pet stains and odors

Accidents happen; here's how to clean up and eliminate the smell

MACHINE-WASHABLE ITEMS

Add a one pound box of baking soda to your regular detergent and wash as usual, air drying if possible. If you can still see or smell the soiling, wash again with an enzymatic cleaner—these break down pet waste odors.

If your pet soils the sheets or blankets on a bed, cover the bed with a vinyl, flannel-backed tablecloth while you retrain them. It's machine washable, inexpensive and unattractive to your pet.

CARPETED AREAS AND UPHOLSTERY

For “new” stains (those that are still wet):

- Soak up as much of the urine as possible. Place a thick layer of paper towels on the wet spot and cover that with a thick layer of newspaper. If possible, put newspaper under the soiled

area as well. Stand on this padding for about a minute and repeat until the area is barely damp.

- If possible, put the fresh, urine-soaked paper towel in your pet's designated “bathroom area.”
- Rinse the “accident zone” thoroughly with clean, cool water and blot dry.

For stains that have already set:

- Consider renting a carpet cleaner from your local hardware or grocery store.
- Use a high-quality pet odor neutralizer once the area is clean.
- Use carpet stain remover if the area still looks stained after it's completely dry.
- Avoid using steam cleaners to clean urine odors from carpet

HOW TO REMOVE PET STAINS AND ODORS

or upholstery. The heat will permanently set the stain and the odor by bonding the protein into any man-made fibers.

- Avoid cleaning chemicals such as ammonia or vinegar. Strong chemical odors may encourage your pet to reinforce the urine scent mark in that area.
- Your job will be more difficult if urine has soaked down into the padding underneath your carpet. In some cases, you may need to replace portions of carpet and padding.

PAINT AND WOOD DAMAGE

If the wood on your furniture, walls, baseboard or floor is discolored, the varnish or paint has reacted to the acid in the urine. You may need to remove and replace the layer of varnish or paint. (If you do so, make sure the new product is safe for pets.) Washable enamel paints and some washable wallpapers may respond favorably to enzymatic cleaners.

FIND OLDER MESSAGES

In some cases, old messes will have dried invisibly and be hard to locate. To find them:

- Use your nose to sniff out soiled areas.
- Examine the suspect area closely to catch hard-to-find soiling.
- If you have a black light, use it to identify soiled areas and lightly outline the areas with chalk.

PREVENT FUTURE INCIDENTS

Once the area is clean, make it unattractive and/or unavailable to your pet and make the appropriate bathroom area attractive. As long as your pet can smell their personal scent, they will continue to return to the “accident zone.”

Have your pet checked by a veterinarian to rule out medical causes for the accident. When you are certain your pet is healthy, use [positive reinforcement](#) to train your cat or dog to eliminate in the proper place.

Finally, remember that there may have been a reason why your pet chose the wrong place to eliminate. Understanding your pet’s motivations will make it easier to get them on the right track again. The re-training period may take a week or more. Remember, it took time to build the bad habit and it will take time to replace that habit with a new, more acceptable behavior.

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How to get your dog to stop digging

IF YOUR DOG is leaving craters all over your yard, it's important to know your dog isn't doing it out of spite or a desire to destroy your landscaping; more likely they're seeking entertainment, attention, comfort, escape, prey or protection.

ENTERTAINMENT

Dogs may dig for entertainment when they learn that roots and soil “play back.” Your dog may be digging for entertainment if:

- They're left alone in the yard for long periods of time without the company of their human family.
- Their environment is relatively barren—with no playmates or toys.
- They're a puppy or adolescent and don't have other outlets for their energy.
- They're a terrier or other breed that was bred to dig.
- They're an active breed who needs a job to be happy.
- They've recently seen you gardening or working in the yard.

What to do

Expand your dog's world and increase their people time in the following ways:

- Walk your dog at least twice daily. Lack of exercise is a leading cause of behavioral problems.
- Play with them using [active toys](#) (balls, flying disks) as often as possible.
- Teach your dog a few commands or tricks. Practice these every day for five to 10 minutes.
- Take a training class with your dog and practice what you learn daily.
- Keep interesting toys in the yard to keep your dog busy when you're not around. Kong®-type toys filled with treats or busy-box dog toys work especially well. Rotate the toys to keep things interesting.

HUNTING PREY

Dogs often dig in an effort to catch [burrowing animals](#) or insects who live in your yard. This may be the case if the digging is:

- Focused on a single area rather than the boundaries of the yard.
- At the roots of trees or shrubs.
- In a “path” layout.

HOW TO GET YOUR DOG TO STOP DIGGING

What to do

Search for signs of burrowing animals, then use safe, humane methods to fence them out, exclude them or make your yard or garden unattractive to them.

What not to do

Don't use any product or method that could be toxic or dangerous to your pets or other animals. Anything that poisons wildlife can poison your dog too.

COMFORT AND PROTECTION

In hot weather, dogs may dig holes to lie in the cool dirt. They may also dig to provide themselves with shelter from cold, wind or rain or to find water. Your dog may be digging for comfort or protection if:

- The holes are near the foundations of buildings, large shade trees or a water source.
- Your dog doesn't have a shelter or their shelter is too hot or cold.
- Your dog lies in the holes they dig.

What to do

Provide your dog with the comfort or protection they seek. Bring them inside more often and make sure their outdoor shelter is comfortable, protected against extreme temperatures and has access to water in an un-tippable bowl. If your dog is still a dedicated digger, try setting aside a digging zone.

ATTENTION

Any behavior can become attention-getting behavior if the dog learns that they receive attention for engaging in it. Remember, even punishment is attention. Your dog may be looking for attention if they dig in your presence or have limited opportunities for interaction with you.

What to do

Ignore attention-seeking behavior and give your pooch lots of praise for "good dog" behavior. Also, make sure your dog has enough walk and play time with you on a daily basis.

ESCAPE

Dogs may try to escape to get to something, to get somewhere or to get away from something. Your dog may be digging to escape if they dig under or along a fence.

What to do

Figure out why your dog is trying to [escape](#) and remove those incentives. Make sure their environment is a safe, appealing place for a dog.

To keep your dog in your yard:

- Bury chicken wire at the base of the fence. Be sure to roll the sharp edges away from your yard.
- Place large rocks, partially buried, along the bottom of the fence line.
- Bury the bottom of the fence one to two feet below the surface.
- Place chain link fencing on the ground (anchored to the bottom of the fence) to make it uncomfortable for your dog to walk near the fence.
- Work with your dog on behavior modification to stop their escape efforts.

WHAT DOESN'T WORK

Regardless of the reason your dog is digging, don't:

- Punish your dog after the fact. This won't address the cause of the behavior and will worsen any digging that's motivated by fear or anxiety.
- Stake out your dog near a hole they've dug or fill the hole with water.

NEXT STEPS: A DIGGING ZONE

If your dog is a dedicated digger, set aside an area of the yard where it's OK for them to dig and teach them where that digging zone is:

- Cover the digging zone with loose soil or sand. Or use a child-sized sandbox.
- Make the digging zone attractive by burying safe items (such as toys) for them to discover.
- When they dig in the digging zone, reward them with praise.
- If you catch your dog digging in an unacceptable area, interrupt the behavior with a loud noise and firmly say, "No dig." Then immediately take them to the digging zone.
- Make the unacceptable digging spots unattractive (at least temporarily) by placing rocks or chicken wire over them.

If you've tried all these strategies and still can't solve your dog's digging problem, keep them indoors with you and supervise them during bathroom breaks in the yard. You may also want to consult a behavior professional for additional help.

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Getting a tick off of your dog

IF YOUR DOG spends a lot of time outside, tick checks should be part of your daily routine. In many areas of the United States, ticks are active year-round, even after a killing frost. Here's how to spot a tick—and what to do if one has grabbed hold of your pet.

STEP 1: SCAN FOR TICKS

Start by running your fingers slowly over your dog's entire body. If you feel a bump or swollen area, check to see if a tick has burrowed there. Don't limit your search to your dog's torso; check between their toes, around their legs, the insides of their ears and all around their face, chin and neck.

STEP 2: IS IT A TICK?

Ticks can be black, brown or tan and they have eight legs. They can also be tiny; some species are only as large as the head of a pin.

STEP 3: SAFE REMOVAL

EQUIPMENT

- Gloves
- Clean tweezers / tick remover
- Disinfectant or antiseptic cream
- Isopropyl alcohol

Stay safe! Always wear gloves while handling ticks to avoid contact with your skin.

Using tweezers:

- Grasp the tick as close to your dog's skin as possible (without pinching your pet).
- Pull it out slowly in a straight, steady motion. Don't jerk; anything left behind could lead to an infection.

GETTING A TICK OFF OF YOUR DOG

Using a tick remover:

- Gently press the remover against your pet's skin near the tick.
- Slide the notch of the remover under the tick, pulling it free.

STEP 4: CLEANUP AND AFTER-CARE

Drop the tick into isopropyl alcohol and note the date you found the tick. If your pet begins displaying symptoms of a tick-borne illness, your veterinarian may want to identify or test it. Some symptoms include arthritis or lameness that lasts for three to four days, reluctance to move, swollen joints, fever, fatigue, swollen lymph nodes, loss of appetite and neurological problems.

Wash your hands, clean your pet's wound with antiseptic and make sure to clean your tweezers with isopropyl alcohol.

Keep an eye on the area where the tick was to see if an infection surfaces. If the skin remains irritated or infected, make an appointment with your veterinarian.

STEP 5: PREVENT FUTURE BITES

If you or your companion animals spend any time outdoors, you should routinely check for ticks. Ticks transfer between hosts, so it is important to check all family members after outdoor activities in wooded, leafy or grassy areas.

Comb your pet regularly with a flea comb, vacuum frequently and dispose of the bags immediately after use, mow areas of the lawn where your dog spends time, wash pet bedding weekly and wash your pet with a pesticide-free pet shampoo. In addition, to protect cats from fleas and ticks, as well as a host of other outdoor hazards, cats should be kept indoors at all times.

You can also ask your veterinarian about flea and tick preventatives.

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