

## PROTOCOL FOR UNDERSTANDING AND MANAGING ODD, CURIOUS, AND ANNOYING CANINE BEHAVIORS

This handout offers advice on how to understand and manage dogs who:

- dig,
- jump, scratch, bolt, and bark at the door,
- grab you or another pet as they go through the door,
- bark and patrol outside activities,
- hump or mount you,
- roll in feces,
- eat feces, and
- never seem to stop moving.

Most of the situations discussed in this protocol pertain to management-related problems. Many people find these behaviors annoying or confusing, but they are versions of normal dog behaviors. In other words, some of these situations may be “problems” to the human, but not for the dog.

When management-related problems become an issue, some creative thinking may be required to both meet the dog’s needs and keep the humans happy. Once you recognize the underlying pattern of how we can best intervene, you will be able to create your own solutions to most problems. *Remember that the keys to successful solutions always involve a humane human response that meets the pet’s needs.*

The scenarios listed below—believe it or not—are all normal canine behaviors. As with all behavioral concerns, the extent to which we understand the behavior to be “normal” depends on the:

- context in which the dog exhibits the behavior,
- intensity of the behavior,
- ability of the dog to be interrupted, and
- extent to which exhibition of the behavior affects other facets of the dog’s life in an undesirable way.

All of the behaviors discussed here could become so extreme that they would meet the diagnostic criteria, for obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). Because we do not understand the early stages of OCD and how it develops, anyone who loves their dogs should be encouraged to redirect any behaviors about which they may have concern early. That’s what these instructions are intended to help you do. If these suggestions do not work, please consult your veterinarian to learn if something more serious is ongoing.

### Digging

Most dogs dig, although some do so zealously. Digging can involve raking or scratching a surface a few times before sniffing, eating, defecation, urination, or turning in a few circles before sleeping.

### Why Do Dogs Dig?

Dogs dig:

- to aerosolize an existing scent,
- to leave a scent mark of their own,
- because the objects they find are interesting or “play” back with them,
- to search for or find an animal that they hear or smell, and
- because they are curious and no one is paying attention to them, or because they are hot and are trying to cool down, or because they are cold and are trying to create shelter.

When dogs dig, they aerosolize scents that may have been hidden. Most of the information dogs obtain about their physical and social environments is likely done through olfactory means. This may be why dogs sometimes scratch before they eliminate: in addition to learning about who was there before them, they contribute to the olfactory environment when they eliminate and they wish to gauge how to spend their “olfactory currency.”

In fact, the recent literature reports that scratching before and after elimination may convey considerable olfactory information, itself, about a dog’s seasonal behaviors, estrus states, social companions, and intruders. Dogs tend to scratch more when they are not on their own property or in areas where other dogs pass frequently. Scratching is another form of marking that has both visual and olfactory components. We know little about scents that are transferred from dogs’ paws, but we do know that this is one body region where dogs can “sweat,” and that there are sebaceous glands between the dog’s foot pads. Sebaceous glands are the source of oily secretions that may be largely invisible but heavily informative to dogs because of the sensitive canine sense of smell.

When dogs dig, hidden objects become found. It’s possible that the dog buried a bone where he is digging, but while digging, dogs also discover roots of trees, rocks, old bulbs, et cetera. These are all objects that enrich the dog’s intellectual and olfactory environment. In the case of roots and plants, many of these objects “play back.” Remember, humans tire pretty quickly when they play a game of tug with the dog—roots of oak trees “play” for a long time.

Dogs may also dig because they hear or smell another animal. Moles, voles, groundhogs, spiders, field mice, white-footed deer mice, et cetera, all burrow to some extent. If the dog sniffs, listens, and paws a bit, and then moves on and repeats these behaviors, they are likely following cues about where another living animal has been. Some dogs may only do this in snow: Some rodents have very elaborate under-snow burrow systems and trails that interest many dogs. When people report attentive behavior, punctuated by listening, scratching, and pouncing in snow, the dog is likely trailing a rodent.

Dogs often dig just because they are curious. Attributing every behavior that annoys humans to “boredom” is simplistic and misses the point for the dogs. We have difficulty defining true boredom for people; we shouldn’t just dismiss the behaviors of another species with a term that we would have even more trouble defining.

Dogs who are very social, curious, or active may just be exploring their environment whenever they dig. If their people were to play with them, these dogs might not dig. If they had a companion or went to an interactive daycare center, they might not dig. If they were provisioned with appropriate areas for digging in a manner that stimulated their mind, they’d still dig, *but* their behavior would not be distressing to the clients.

Finally, dogs can dig because it’s one way they can regulate their temperature. During hot weather dogs dig because the earth is cool. Dogs can cool off by putting their belly on soil. In the winter, dogs can dig holes in the snow or dirt to

create a cave-like environment where, if they curl up, they can stay warmer than they would if they were exposed.

### How Can We Meet a Digger's Needs?

You can reward your digging dog in a way that stimulates his brain and gives him some exercise by burying rawhides or other treats or toys in a bucket or tub of dirt and letting him find them.

Dogs can use their digging skills with frozen toys, a particularly helpful idea in the summer. You can reuse clean, quart yogurt containers to make great digging dog toys. Fill the containers half-full with water or broth, then add a really good treat (e.g., cooked chicken liver, tiny bits of dried liver, very small pieces of cooked bacon, little pieces of apples for dogs who like fruit), then add more water and refreeze. Plunge the frozen container into hot water to release the quart-sized food toy. Now the dogs have a “food-sicle” that is mentally stimulating and helpful in the hot weather, and they can use the same skills involved in digging to focus on the toy.

For dogs who like to dig in really wet areas, fill a kiddie pool with water and add one of these frozen food toys. The frozen toy will float because ice is lighter than water and so will move and float in a way that challenges the dog to capture the food-sicle. Kongs, Planet, or other rubber and reusable food toys filled with peanut butter or cheese can also be frozen. The dogs have to really work to get to the treat, making the treat last longer. Low-calorie peanut butter may also be more palatable for the dog when frozen.

Some of the newer food toys have expanded on the idea of the original Buster Cube, providing both easier (Roll-A-Treat Ball) and harder puzzles. All of these items use the premise that when the toy is batted or moved the treats fall out. The dog is rewarded for getting the exercise of chasing the toys and for the intellectual part of figuring out how best to get the treats. These are easy ways to stimulate dogs that will help strengthen the relationship between you and your dog.

### What About Dogs Who Use Digging as Temperature Control?

Some dogs dig because they are thermoregulating. Dogs can insulate themselves in snow in the winter and stay warm. This is what sled dogs do when they sleep at nights. Their tails provide the top of the “shelter” that insulates them from wind, and if snow falls on them they are even warmer because they become part of the snow cave.

Clients more commonly report (or complain) that their dogs dig in the summer. Part of the problem is that we often have breeds of dogs who were not bred for the environment in which we live. The same strategy that makes it possible for Newfoundlands to survive frigid waters off the coast of Canada to save someone, works against them closer to the equator. Understanding your pet's coat design will help you to better meet his needs. For example, some breeds of dogs have double coats, and knowing how to seasonally groom them may help your dog.

We humans can both “pant”—breathe quickly to expose a wet cavity to passing air—and sweat, and so control our body temperature by what is called *evaporative cooling*. The number of sweat glands varies with region of our body with the feet, hands, and head having the most sweat glands. Regardless,

we can lose water through sweat over our entire body. **Dogs cannot.** They can only lose water for evaporative cooling from panting and from evaporation from their nose and foot pads.

Shaving the dog is *not* the answer because sunburn *can* happen in dogs, and a lack of insulation may make the dog hotter. Providing dogs with a wading pool can help. But if dogs are really hot and have no access to water, they will often dig a pit and lie with their belly and back legs fully extended and in contact with the dirt. By exposing the lightly haired area of their body to a cool surface they can transfer body heat across the gradient to the earth and cool off. Of course, they may have to move to create another cool pit if theirs heats up, which can happen in some environments.

By providing other thermoregulation choices (e.g., pools, fans, digging pits created by filling kiddie pools with wet sand and placing them under shade trees, et cetera) you can minimize the likelihood that your dog will dig in your garden to control his body temperature.

Most people are familiar with sweaters and coats for small or sparsely haired dogs to keep them warm. There are also now commercially available cooling pads and vests that functionally act as ice packs against the skin. For dogs who get too warm, these should be a serious consideration.

### Are Some Breeds Likely to Be Diggers?

Indeed, many dogs dig because they are of a breed that we asked to dig. Jack Russell terriers, Glen of Imaal terriers, fox or rat terriers, et cetera, were all developed to track, chase, and kill rodents. When we decided that these breeds would be purely “pleasure pets,” we did not undo the years of selection for dogs that dug well and fast. Many dogs of these breeds will even tunnel through walls in your house if you have rodents or termites! All of the above suggestions will help meet these dogs' needs, but, they may not be enough. If your dog is determined to excavate your property, and she is otherwise normal and healthy, consider getting involved in Earthdog Trials (see [www.akc.org/events/earthdog/](http://www.akc.org/events/earthdog/) for information). These are sporting events, like agility, flyball, et cetera, where the skill being directed to an appropriate venue is digging. The dogs dig to find a caged (and generally fully habituated) rodent. Timing and accuracy matter. If you are curious, just go watch one of these trials; you'll come home grateful that you have any yard left at all.

### Jumping, Scratching, Bolting, and Barking at the Door

Jumping can be a normal behavior, and for some of the smaller or herding dogs we have not only encouraged that the dogs jump for work, but we have encouraged jumping in play. Sometimes we think it's cute that dogs will jump. Those small poodles who walk around on their hind legs while wearing tutus in performance situations are champion jumpers.

Jumping, barking, lunging, and bolting are all behaviors that commonly occur at doors and annoy humans. Unfortunately, humans exhibit behaviors that accidentally encourage these patterns, and teach the dogs to better perform exactly the behaviors we find most annoying.

Here are some *common situations created by humans* that turn into *problems for the dogs*.

- **Problem A:** When people open a door, they do not ask the dog to sit and be quiet before they actually open the door to whomever is on the other side. Yet the behaviors we have selected for in dogs include the barking as vocal alert that tells us someone is at the door! In fact, without breeding for and encouraging these types of attentive behaviors we would have no explosive or drug detection dogs.

• **Solution A:** Acknowledge the bark, go see what's going on, and ask the dog to sit and be quiet, then tell your dog that he is brilliant when he sits quietly. Wait until this happens. Where is it written that you *must* open the door immediately? Have the same consideration for your dog that you have for your guests. If you start a young pup off with these rules you will have no problems, but consistency is key.

So that your guests don't think you are rude tell them you will not open the door until the dog is sitting quietly. Or, put a note on the door that says you are working to improve the dog's social and greeting skills and the door will be opened when the dog is quiet.

For many, many dogs, quiet can be maintained by quickly offering the dog a toy and telling them they can get up when they "take it." This is like magic: They cannot bark annoyingly with their mouth full, they self-reward for being quiet, and dogs with toys are less likely to jump, and instead greet everyone by carrying a toy around and wiggling. This is so simple that, of course, few people think of it.

- **Problem B:** When dogs start to lunge at or through the doors, or jump on people who are entering, their humans tend to pull the dog back by the collar. What people do not realize is that dogs push against pressure. This means that when you grab a collar it tightens under the dog's throat and the dog lunges harder. Humans then tend to yell at the dog who, understandably, is now fairly confused.

• **Solution B:** Either teach the dog to sit quietly, as above, or, if you must use a physical cue to stop the dog, place your hand gently against the dog's chest, so that he backs up. If you are worried about grabbing, biting, or fleeing, you have two other choices.

1. Isolate the dog behind a baby gate elsewhere before you expect company. The dog can then be let out to join the people when the door is closed, the greetings completed, and the people calm and sitting down.
2. Put a head collar on your dog when you are home to supervise him and allow him to drag a light lead that slips through furniture. Then, when someone comes to the door, you can do everything recommended in this section, but also:
  - take the lead,
  - ask the dog to sit and ensure that he does so by gently pulling up on the lead, and
  - close the dog's mouth by gently pulling forward on the head collar.

Then, the dog can have a toy. If he doesn't like toys, he can have a treat for being quiet. The dog must have a reward once calm and quiet, and praise is not enough. If you truly think that the dog might snap at or bite the person at the door, unless you are specifically working on some prescribed behavior modification, *you should not have the dog at the door*. The dog should be behind

a baby gate, in a crate out of the way, or locked behind another door. And your guests should know that the dog might snap or bite and not be able to interact with them.

- **Problem C:** People tell dogs what **not** to do, but never tell them what **to do**. The situation at the door is a perfect example of this pattern in the extreme. The dog wants to ensure that his people pay appropriate attention, while the people are telling the dog "no." The dog is saying "yes, yes, yes...there is someone here," while the human is saying "no, Roscoe, down." The result is some profound cross-communication which results in the humans raising their voices.

There is no need to yell at the dog—the problem is not deafness, it is inadequate signaling. There is an additional liability associated with yelling at the dog: the human becomes upset. This bodes poorly for the dog.

- **Solution C:** This problem is *so* easy to address.
  - The dog barks.
  - You verbally acknowledge the bark ("Good boy, Flash!").
  - You go see what the dog sees or hears ("You're right, Flash, FedEx is here.").
  - You thank the dog ("Thanks for letting me know, Flash.").
  - You ask the dog to sit and be quiet ("Can you sit and give me a smooch, boy?").

The second the dog sits you tell the dog that he is brilliant and you reward him with praise, with a treat, or with a toy ("Oh, you are so wonderful, take your toy!"). You repeat as necessary.

- **Problem D:** Dogs bolt through doors because they take advantage of opportunity. If the dog is always ready to bolt, what canine needs might not be being met?

• **Solution D:** Make sure that the only exercise, outdoor stimulation, or interaction the dog gets is **not** restricted to what he can steal. Dogs who get adequate access to the outdoors are pretty happy to stand quietly by a door when appropriate. To make this work, you need to know how much and what type of exercise your dog needs. On week-ends, learn what schedule of outdoor time and what type of exercise will stop the dog from bolting. Use that schedule to meet the dog's needs. Some dogs always bolt because this behavior ensures that they have the opportunity to go out and eliminate. You can avoid bolting by taking the dog out often. Dogs should get all of the following:

1. off-lead exercise, if safe and possible,
2. on-lead walks of a good length and of sufficient social and intellectual interest, and
3. quick pit stops for bladder and bowel comfort. Canine metabolisms are a lot like yours, so if you are home, you may wish to give the dog a quick pit stop every time you take one yourself.

- **Problem E:** Dogs who are without behavioral pathology scratch at the door because:

- there is someone on the other side of it,
- they have to go out, and
- they get some attention for doing so anyway.

• **Solution E:** Consider putting a Plexiglas shield on the door if damage is a concern. These shields are now commercially available from pet product catalogs. Once you stop worrying about damage you'll have more mental space left to meet the dog's needs.

If the dog is trained to “knock” to go out, or if she trains you that this is what scratching means, you must let her out. You can creatively take advantage of the scratching at the door by putting sandpaper over the part of the door where the scratching occurs. This will keep the dog’s nails smooth while also stopping him from damaging the door.

Even if you are not going to let the dog out, unless you wish the behavior to become worse and more intense, you *must* go to the door immediately to see if anyone is there. Dogs will intensify their behavior until you finally get up. By that time you are annoyed and you have taught your dog to be persistent. Tell the dog “thank you,” take a good look, and then if there are no further interactions to occur at the door, tell the dog that “that will do.” You can hasten the dog’s understanding of his role in starting or stopping this type of “door alert” by using a reward for being quiet. A treat or a toy could be a reward here. It’s a good idea to keep a treat jar or toy basket by the door for these purposes.

Make sure that the dog is not training you, unless you wish to be trained. Dogs will learn quickly about the treats and alert all the time. If you only reward the dog when the “door alert” is real, the dog will work with you.

If you want your dog to have a different signal at the door for “I have to go out to wee” from “there is someone at the door,” hang bells from the door. Take the dog’s paw, tap the bell, say “good dog,” open the door (with the dog on a lead, if needed for safety or to get the dog back), and take the dog out. Because going outside is so rewarding it will take very few replications of this behavior for your dog to “get it.” And, yes, if you are not otherwise meeting their exercise needs, some dogs will tap the bell often, but this should tell you how to meet your dog’s needs. The dog will learn that when no one is home the bell is not answered.

## Grabbing You or Another Dog or Cat When You Go Through the Door

Many dogs who grab humans, and who are normal, are just excited. Some dogs who grab humans are not normal and may need to control humans in order to have some sense of security. *We are not discussing the latter group of dogs here.* They are discussed in the **Protocol for Understanding, Managing and Treating Dogs with Impulse Control Aggression.**

The dogs who are excited are similar to humans who are excited, but without opposable thumbs. Opposable thumbs are what allow you to grab people, pick up a coffee cup, and hold someone’s hand. Dogs use their mouth for behaviors where humans use thumbs.

Many dogs who grab humans or other dogs as they go through doors are dogs from herding breeds. This makes sense: Grabbing someone as they move through the environment is the very definition of herding behavior. Not everyone understands that the dog is “just herding you,” and many other pets become frightened or injured.

The rule for these dogs is simple: You have a toy basket inside every door, you have a toy basket outside every door, and the dog must take a toy and sit quietly before any door is opened (see photo). Continue to request that the dog stay as you open the door, then quickly release her and get out of the way.



Toys in a basket placed by the door so that dogs can be handed the toys before going through the door. This prevents the dogs from grabbing humans in their excitement to go outside.

## Barking and Patrolling Activities That Occur on the Street

Dogs will watch what’s happening in their world by looking through windows or doors. If your dog has nothing else to stimulate him, like the caricatured nosey, old lady down the street, he will spend more time watching activities outside the house. If you are not home, these behaviors will become reinforced because they are self-reinforcing: your dog sees someone, he barks, he becomes stimulated by his own barking, and then whoever was in the street moves on and the situation changes. If the dog is inclined to be protective, the situation is even more self-rewarding: he alerted, he protected, and the person who threatened his home left! He succeeded!

If it is important for you that your dog *not* exhibit these behaviors when you are *not* home, you will have to make it impossible for your dog to patrol and alert.

*Please do not even consider using a shock collar to stop this behavior.* This is like saying you’ll chop off a dog’s leg to stop him from jumping.

Instead, use blinds, curtains, barriers, gates, large and spacious crates, et cetera, to provide an environment that protects your dog from the stimulus, and then make sure that the dog has other kinds of stimulation. This is where the food puzzles discussed in the section on digging can be useful.

If you are home, treat this behavior in the same way you do rowdy behavior at the door, which is discussed above. Additionally, figure out ways to keep your dogs stimulated and/or closer—but not glued—to you. You can practice asking the dog to sit at the door, and then calling him away. If you give him a treat every time he leaves the door, calling him from the door will become much easier. By doing this and providing stimulation that does not rely on those who pass by, you will make it easier to interrupt your dog’s alerting behavior and to redirect him to a preferred behavior (e.g., carrying a rope toy).

## Mounting and “Humping”

Mounting and humping are behaviors that trigger more mythical and pseudoscientific explanations than any other behaviors. The most common incorrect explanation is that the dog is being “dominant” to the human, dog, cat, stuffed animal, et cetera, that he is mounting. Think about that for a minute and you’ll realize that it makes no sense.

The second explanation that is usually offered is that this is about sex. This statement is almost always followed with “but he is neutered” if you live in the United States.

Here’s what we know:

- Both intact and neutered/desexed dogs can mount.
- Both males and females can mount.
- Unless this behavior is part of a sequence in a dog fight or antagonistic interaction, in which case the actual behaviors are very different, such behaviors are stiff, directed toward the shoulders and neck, and the dog is very focused and quiet. Most mounting is about affiliation or wanting to be with others and/or is used as an attempt to get the others to pay attention to you.
- Dogs will hump people when they are happy and want the people to interact with them.
- Humping is involved as a part of the sequence involved in sex or masturbation. The form is very different from the affiliative form: sex and masturbation involve fast, repetitive motions, leaning with the face and neck on the object of desire, and facial signal changes. Both males and females, neutered and intact dogs can masturbate.
- It’s a normal behavior.

Now that you know what’s normal, also understand that dogs will work for information and a salary. If you do not wish to be humped or mounted, ask the dog to stop, to sit, and reward that behavior instantly. If the dog goes back to mounting you, get up and walk away. When the dog pays attention to you, ask him to stop, to sit, and, again, reward sitting instantly. If the mounting behavior continues, the dog is either not being rewarded quickly enough, or the reward is not good enough when compared to humping your leg. Learning is also involved in this behavior: many dogs have learned that humping feels good and that at some point you liked it because you laughed. Think about this.

## Rolling in Feces

Many dogs roll in feces. The feces chosen is usually that of other dogs or of other species, and not the dog’s own feces. We must remember that our sense of smell is very “impaired” compared to that of dogs so that we cannot fairly understand this behavior. Hypotheses about why dogs do this include:

- rolling to disperse, and so lessen, the effect of the original scent,
- covering the original scent with the dog’s own,
- making a visual statement about the other animal’s mark,
- covering themselves in another animal’s scent for camouflage,
- using the scent as an insect repellent,
- obtaining chemicals from the feces that help nervous system development and immune health, and
- gaining information from the scent about who the animal was, when he last passed through, and what he had recently eaten.

For now, it’s probably safe to say that any or all of these could be true in different contexts, and that there are likely other reasons that we do not understand.

If you find rolling in feces obnoxious, please remember:

- dogs are washable,
- if unsupervised, dogs who like to do this will do it more,
- dogs share this information with other dogs and can introduce another dog to the joys of rolling, and
- if you wish the dog to stop doing this you must interrupt them as early in the sequence as possible. In other words, if you have a dog who does this and you see her beginning to focus her sniffing in a specific area, you know that she will take a dive. The time to call her to you and reward her for coming without rolling is when she begins to focus her sniffing.



Dogs who roll in feces can find feces, even under snow, as shown in **A**. One dog, shown in **B**, rolls in the feces, dispersing it, and leaves a large visual snow signal that the feces were found by a dog who dispersed them.

## Eating Feces of Other Species

Ingestion of other’s feces can either be a normal behavior or one of desperation.

Starved animals will eat the feces of others. Puppies kept in pet stores and those bred in puppy mills/farms may not be fed enough if the pet store or puppy dealer wishes to keep them small, and so may be both hungry enough to eat their own feces, and under-stimulated enough to use feces as toys. This is one very good reason why dogs and cats should never be purchased from pet stores. Please remember that virtually

all pet store puppies and dogs come from puppy mills/farms and likely received inadequate food, care, exercise, et cetera.

Dogs who are inappropriately punished for elimination may become ultra-fastidious as a way to avoid the pain and anxiety that they have come to associate with elimination. Some of these dogs will ingest their urine or feces immediately after elimination or as they are eliminating.

Finally, some dogs ingest feces (coprophagia) as a manifestation of OCD. These dogs all need more than just management-related help, and would benefit from a visit to a specialist in veterinary behavioral medicine.

That said, many dogs enjoy snacking on the feces of other individuals. They may enjoy cat feces because they are actually high in protein and animal muscle that is not fully digested. Dogs often love the feces of herbivores (e.g., deer, rabbits, cows, horses), and it has been suggested that this is because these species all use bacteria in their digestion and the bacteria form a source of protein. Additionally, this can be a good way to get partially digested herbs and grains, like oats.

Ingestion of feces is not a behavior that is easily amenable to change because it is *normal*.

The keys to **controlling** eating of feces are simple and difficult to continuously implement:

- don't let the dog ingest the feces to begin with and
- keep a sharp eye so that you see the feces before the dog does and can call him away.

In a worst case scenario, this activity will improve both your and the dog's reflexes as you continually race each other to the feces. It may be easier to brush the dog's teeth every day, which has other benefits.

If you know your dog ingests feces, please be aware that they can contract parasites this way and that they should be screened by your veterinarian for these at least every 6 months. Please also know that some of these parasites may be transmissible to humans if the dog gives lots of kisses and saliva is exchanged. This is more common and worrisome with small children, and dogs in urban areas, but you should know that this is one way dogs can pass disease to humans.

If the dog ingests only canine feces, the solution is easy: clean up all dog feces found, including those deposited by other dogs. It is harder to know where the feces of squirrels, rabbits, deer, foxes, raccoons, cats, et cetera, are, and so more difficult—and in some cases, impossible—to remove them.

Some people use muzzles to help control the ingestion of feces. You should know that some dogs can eat feces through muzzles. Muzzles may send other messages to the neighbors about your dog; consider whether this is what you wish. Some dogs become incredibly unhappy in a muzzle and the quality of their life declines. Muzzles should be reserved for situations where they are mandated by pressing health concerns.

## Mouthing and Biting

Mouthing and biting are common complaints of people who have, inadvertently, played too roughly with their dog or cats. No puppy should be encouraged to mouth. Puppies will "mouth" naturally because they use their mouths much as we use our hands. It is a simple matter to abort this behavior when it is first starting, but mouthing can be tremendously difficult to stop if it has been ongoing for a long time.

- Think about the behaviors that you see in your pup and ask if you wish to see the same behaviors when that puppy is an 85-pound (~45-kg) adult dog.
- Ask yourself if the behaviors you see in the pup would be desirable if you are rushing around like crazy during the holiday season and the house is full of people.

If the answer to either of those questions is "no," you can and should take preventative action to avoid or abort potentially undesirable behaviors by learning about age-related normal behavior and how you can best shape appropriate and desirable behaviors, given the breed and adult size of the dog you have.

People are more tolerant of troublesome behaviors with dogs who will still be small as adults than they are with dogs who will be larger, but for the complaints of mouthing and biting, tolerance can produce an obnoxious and difficult to handle little dog. No dog, regardless of size, should feel that he has to mouth or bite someone to get anything that he needs, including attention.

- The first thing clients can do to stop this annoying and potentially dangerous behavior is to stop interacting with the puppy and freeze as soon as you are mouthed or grabbed. If you pull your hand away from the puppy or kitten, even if you are doing so to avoid a prick, you are encouraging him to pursue the "game."
- You can use a *gentle* verbal cue to signal that the interaction is finished (say "no," "stop," "uh-uh," "all done"), and *gently* extricate or remove your body part while *gently* holding the body of the animal. These are babies. They make mistakes. They can be injured easily. They may have hurt you, but you don't have to hurt them.
- Then, quickly offer the puppy something on which she can chew (e.g., a stuffed toy, a ball, a chew toy) and tell her that she is good.
- When puppies play with toys that you hold, they may mouth you again. Be prepared to redirect the mouthing back to the toy and repeat this as often as necessary.
- If your puppy persists, you can make a sharp noise (e.g., a whistle) as a distraction. Remember that the only reason you wish to distract him is so that the behavior stops. *You do not have to scare the dog to stop him from mouthing. If you scared your dog, then the behavior you used to interrupt him was inappropriate or the timing was wrong.*
- As soon as the undesirable behavior stops, you need to encourage an appropriate behavior. In the absence of this information, puppies will again offer mouthing, if it worked in the past, or more intense behaviors like biting. By offering these behaviors, puppies learn if these are the behaviors that will get you to interact with them. *Puppies and kittens are asking for information; you provide information when you respond to their behaviors and by the way you respond.*
- Stopping the behavior is important. **It is equally important to REWARD the cessation of the undesirable behavior with a behavior that is fun, but more appropriate (i.e., chewing on a toy).**
- Remember, puppies are hugely energetic and will tire the average human almost instantly. You have to be vigilant. If you are not willing to be vigilant, consider placing the puppy in a safe area (his own room, a crate, a pen) with a safe chew or food toy until you feel that you have the energy again to face the onslaught of play.
- If you don't feel like you can honestly face this type of activity day after day, please consider whether a pet sitter

or dog walker can help. Perhaps there is a responsible child in your neighborhood who is not allowed to have a pet but who might be happy to learn to play appropriately with your puppy. Children can be excellent at teaching pets tricks and teaching pets manners, if they are given some guidance.

- The bottom line is that puppies and kittens need lots of exercise and mental stimulation. Both of these activities can be geared to teaching them safe, socially acceptable behaviors.

If you have done all of the above, and the puppy or dog is still grabbing, mouthing, or biting people or other animals and you are sure no one has encouraged this behavior, consider seeing your veterinarian or a specialist in veterinary behavior for an evaluation. Dogs who are worried or anxious will take treats more roughly than they would have otherwise and may grab people or dogs to stop them. Dogs use their mouths as hands. If the dog needs to control everything, this is a problem. The earlier you seek help the better. With newer, humane head collars and harnesses it has never been easier to redirect mouthing, grabbing behavior, but you have to see them clearly for what they are—points of concern—first.

Some breeds or lines of dogs, like herding dogs, may grab more readily than others because they have been selected to do so. This does not mean that you must tolerate being grabbed if your dog is a breed selected for herding and guarding. Instead, you need to know that this can be a normal behavior for them and that they can learn to exhibit it only in appropriate contexts. Inappropriate herding behavior is a common complaint, and almost always starts early in the dog's life. Redirection is possible. Inhibition is possible. For the best outcome, early recognition and intervention is essential because behaviors that have been selected for are easily and naturally rewarded.

There are more ideas for how to manage rough play, including mouthing and biting, in the handout **Protocol for Teaching Kids—and Adults—to Play with Dogs and Cats**.

## Energy, Energy, Energy

Most dogs that people think are hyperactive are not; they are high-energy dogs whose needs are unmet. Both you and your dog likely get less exercise than you need. Almost all dogs can benefit from increased **aerobic** exercise. Tired dogs are happy dogs and they have ecstatic people!

Think of the needs of your dog in terms of breed, age, and individual temperament or personality. Young border collies from working lines are not good candidates for couch potato status. Meet the needs you identify in your dog.

Suggestions for increasing aerobic exercise include leash walks, running with your dog, and playing with toys indoors

and out. Many frisbees and balls are now made from fleece, which can cause minimal damage if the toys are thrown indoors. That said, if you have priceless and fragile art objects, find another place to play indoors with the dog. Regardless, this type of exercise, alone, is unlikely to fatigue a dog.

If you want a calm dog you need to know what is necessary to encourage the dog to stop on his own. Learn what causes the dog to fatigue. It may be 30 minutes of running, it may be 3 hours of running. It may be that you never learn the limit because you collapse before the dog does, but all of these data are clues.

Still, there is hope.

If you want your dog to be exhausted there is no replacement for play with another dog. Indoor and outdoor play with other dogs is intellectually challenging, aerobic, and usually contextually appropriate. Take advantage of this. If you do not have another dog, see if one of your neighbors has a dog who plays well and also needs exercise. Join, or start, a doggie play group.

Intellectual stimulation, clear and kind rules, and opportunities for dogs to know that they can succeed and will be rewarded for succeeding are important. As dogs begin to improve, become more attentive, and are calmer, consider adding clicker training for tricks, or sports like agility and herding. Just do not push your dog faster than she can or wishes to go, and realize that she may not like all sports. If you decide to engage in these activities, please insure that you have had your vet check your dog to ensure she is healthy enough for such work, and that you have discussed your dog's problems and needs with the organizer or instructor. Your dog may not be suitable for the class you had in mind, or it may not be suitable for her. Many dog clubs run smaller or quieter classes for needier dogs. Please be realistic; to not do so may be injurious to your dog, and your dog's well-being has to be your first concern.

Finally, there are sports where you—the human—can do almost nothing, but the dog runs like crazy: with flyball you get to sit while the dog does all the work. If your dog likes this activity, there are also automated ball baskets that you can program to send a tennis ball into the air on a regular basis. If you are a couch potato with an energetic young dog, swallow your embarrassment and do what's necessary to help him out.

## Final Words

Remember that *the simplest way to encourage a desired behavior is to reward it*, even if it happens without your instructions. So when your dog is sleeping, tell her she is incredibly beautiful and brilliant! Repeat early and often.