

Territorial Marking Behavior in Dogs



Dogs are territorial animals. They "stake out a claim" to a particular space, area or object. They let other people and animals know about their claim by marking it by urinating or defecating on it. Urine marking is not a house soiling problem, but is a territorial behavior. Therefore, to resolve the problem, you need to address the underlying reason for your dog's need to mark territory in this way. Both male and female dogs mark.

House Soiling or Urine Marking? How To Tell The Difference!

Your dog may be urine-marking if:

- ◆ The amount of urine is small and is found primarily on vertical surfaces. Leg-lifting is a dominant version of urine-marking, but even if your dog doesn't lift his or her leg, he/she may still be urine-marking.
- ◆ Both intact males and females are more likely to urine mark than are spayed or neutered dogs. However, even spayed or neutered animals may mark in response to other intact animals in the home.
- ◆ Your dog urinates on new objects in the environment (a shopping bag, a visitor's purse), on objects that have unfamiliar smells, or on objects that have another animal's scent.
- ◆ Your dog has conflicts with other animals in your home. When there's instability or stress, a dog may feel a need to establish dominance by urine-marking his/her territory.
- ◆ Your dog marks frequently on neighborhood walks.

What You Can Do:

- ◆ Spay or neuter your dog as soon as possible. Spaying or

neutering may stop urine-marking altogether. However, if he/she has been urine-marking over a long period of time, a pattern may already be established.

- ◆ Resolve conflicts between animals in your home.
- ◆ Clean soiled areas thoroughly using an enzymatic cleaner. Don't use strong smelling cleaners as these may cause your dog to "over-mark" the spot.
- ◆ Make previously soiled areas inaccessible or unattractive. If making soiled areas inaccessible or unattractive isn't possible, try to change the significance of those areas. Feed, treat and play with your dog in the areas he is inclined to mark.
- ◆ Keep objects likely to be marked out of reach. Guests' belongings, new purchases and so forth, should be placed in a closet or cabinet.
- ◆ If your dog is marking in response to a new resident in your home (a new baby, roommate or spouse), have the new resident make friends with your dog by feeding, grooming and playing with your dog.
- ◆ For dogs: watch your dog at all times when he is indoors for signs that he is thinking about urinating.
- ◆ When he begins to urinate, interrupt him with a loud noise and take him outside, then praise him and give him a treat if he urinates outside. When you're unable to watch him, put your dog in confinement or tether him to you with a leash.

What NOT To Do:

Don't punish your dog after the fact. Punishment administered

even a minute after the event is ineffective because your dog won't understand why he is being punished.

Pets Aren't People

Dogs don't urinate or defecate out of spite or jealousy. If your dog urinates on your baby's diaper bag, it's not because he is jealous of, or dislikes your baby. The unfamiliar scents and sounds of a new baby in the house are simply causing him to reaffirm his claim on his territory. Likewise, if your dog urinates on your new boyfriend's backpack, this is not his opinion of your taste in men. Instead, he has perceived the presence of an "intruder" and is letting the intruder know that this territory belongs to him.

Dominance or Anxiety?

Urine-marking is usually associated with dominance behavior. While this is often the case, some pets may mark when they feel anxious or upset. For example, a new baby in the home brings new sounds, smells and people, as well as changes in routine. Your dog probably isn't getting as much attention as he was used to getting. All of these changes cause him to feel anxious, which may cause him to mark. Likewise, a dog that is generally anxious may become more so by the introduction of a new cat or dog into your household.

If your dog is feeling anxious, you might consider talking to your veterinarian about medications to reduce his anxiety while you work on behavior modification.



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