BEHAVIOR SERIES

Dealing with Submissive and Excitement Urination

MOST PET OWNERS APPRECIATE an enthusiastic welcome from their dogs at the end of the day. But their pleasure can be substantially lessened when their dogs' wiggles of delight are coupled with a puddle of urine requiring cleanup. Your dog may have passed his housetraining with flying colors yet still not be able to control his bladder in certain situations. Submissive and excitement urination are not housetraining problems; they are involuntary reflexes that require patience and specific training methods to correct.

Submissive Urination

With one second left in the championship game, the basketball player has to make one free throw to send the game into overtime and keep her team's hopes for victory alive. A hush comes over the arena while beads of sweat roll down her face. It's the first time she's been in this situation. She shoots the ball…and it clangs off the rim…

Just as an athlete may make a mistake when her confidence wanes in a daunting situation, so too may a dog. A dog who is threatened and lacks confidence may urinate out of submission. He may also urinate when he's being punished or verbally scolded, or when he's approached by someone he perceives to be a threat.

And just as the athlete will gain confidence as she plays in more high-pressure situations, your dog's submissive urination may resolve itself as he gains confidence. You can help to build his confidence by teaching him commands and rewarding him for obeying. You should also gradually expose him to new people and new situations and try to make sure all his new experiences are positive and happy.

Your Dog May Have a Submissive Urination Problem If:

- He urinates when he's being scolded.
- He urinates when someone approaches him.
- He urinates when he's being greeted.
- He has a history of being treated roughly or being punished long after he has displayed unwanted behaviors.
- He is a somewhat shy, anxious, or timid dog.
- He urinates while making submissive postures, such as crouching, tail tucking, or rolling over and exposing his belly.

What to Do If Your Dog Has a Submissive Urination Problem

- Take your dog to the veterinarian to rule out medical reasons for the behavior.
- Keep greetings low-key.
- Encourage and reward confident postures (sitting, standing) from him.
- Give him an alternative to behaving submissively. For example, if he knows a few commands, have him "sit" or "shake" as you approach, and reward him for obeying.

continued on reverse side

- Avoid approaching him with postures that he reads as dominant. To do this:
  - Avoid direct eye contact. Look at his back or tail instead.
  - Get down on his level by bending at the knees rather than leaning over from the waist. Ask others to approach him in the same way.
  - Pet him under the chin rather than on top of the head.
  - Approach him from the side, rather than from the front, or present the side of your body to him, rather than your full front.
- Don't punish or scold him. This will only make the problem worse.

Excitement Urination

Excitement urination occurs most often during greetings and playtime and is not accompanied by submissive posturing. Excitement urination usually resolves on its own as a dog matures. In some cases, however, the problem can persist if the dog is frequently punished or if the dog's behavior is inadvertently reinforced—such as by petting or talking to your dog in a soothing or coddling tone after he urinates when excited.

Your Dog May Have an Excitement Urination Problem If:

- He urinates when excited, such as during greetings or playtime.
- He urinates when excited and is less than one year old.

What to Do If Your Dog Has an Excitement Urination Problem

- Take your dog to the veterinarian to rule out medical reasons for the behavior.
- To avoid accidents, play outdoors until the problem is resolved.
- Don't punish or scold him.
- Keep greetings low-key.
- When he's excited, ignore him until he's calm.

Adapted from material originally developed by applied animal behaviorists at the Dumb Friends League, Denver, Colorado.
©2000 Dumb Friends League and ©2003 The HSUS.
All rights reserved.

This information provided for you by

Animal Humane
NEW MEXICO

VETERINARIAN Hill's SCIENCE DIET RECOMMENDED

Promoting the Protection of All Animals

THE HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES®

2100 L Street, NW, Washington, DC 20037
202-452-1100 ▪ www.hsus.org