

# Solving Canine Behavior Problems

Melanie Schlaginhaufen

Solving behavioral problems requires a multi-faceted approach based on an individual dog's temperament, as well as the dog's present environment. I cannot access your dog's temperament as I write this article, or individualize a behavioral modification program without working with you and your dog. However, I can outline certain steps for you that have proven helpful in solving any type of behavioral problem, regardless of the type of dog

1. Have your dog checked out thoroughly by a knowledgeable veterinarian, to rule out any physical condition that may be causing the problem. For example, a dog with an ear infection can become head-shy, a dog with painful hips will not want a child to push on them, and an itchy dog may be hypersensitive and irritable, as will a dog with a hormonal imbalance. If a medical condition is found, be sure to ask about any behavioral side effects from medication (for example, some dogs have shown more aggressive tendencies while on Prednisone or Rimadyl™, so if your dog already has a problem, your veterinarian might prescribe the lowest possible dose or an alternative medication).

2. Identify the triggers for the inappropriate behavior and avoid them during the initial phase of the behavioral modification program. *This is particularly important if you are trying to reduce aggressive behaviors.* Triggers need to be removed so the dog is not allowed to continue "practicing" negative behaviors. Each time a dog reacts in a certain way, it will become more likely to be ingrained as a permanent behavior. If it is not possible to remove the triggers, at least make sure you have your dog on a leash and training collar so that you will have the opportunity to interrupt the behavior if it occurs. Sometimes we remove a trigger for only for three weeks or so of the program, then gradually re-introduce it, after we have conditioned in behaviors that we can use to replace the inappropriate behavior. Dogs should always be taught *what to do instead* (appropriate replacement behaviors that are incompatible with the problem behaviors).

3. Decide on replacement behaviors that are incompatible with the unwanted behaviors. Thoroughly train these replacement behaviors all the way through to the polishing phase (making sure the dog will obey commands around distractions). Work with an experienced trainer or canine behavior specialist--ask your veterinarian for a recommendation, or go to the website for International Association of Canine Professionals to search for a member in your area, see [www.dogpro.org](http://www.dogpro.org).



4. Help your dog become less reactive through the use of exercise, proper diet, supplements and management of the environment.

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