



HUMANE SOCIETY OF BROWARD COUNTY

Behavior Modification Handout

Digging

Inappropriate or destructive digging is a common problem. Determining what is motivating your dog to dig will help to create a behavior modification plan to redirect and control this behavior.

Why Is My Dog Doing That?

Most dogs dig out of boredom or social isolation. If your dog is left outside by himself for long periods of time (or even short periods) he will likely resort to entertaining himself. Digging is just plain fun for your dog! Supervising your pet while outside is critical in encouraging appropriate behavior.

Other reasons that may motivate your dog to dig:

- Seeking comfort from hot or cold weather.
- Trying to escape from an enclosure, like a fenced in yard.
- Predation or hunting behaviors, common in terrier breeds.
- Attention seeking behavior.
- Relieving excess energy.

It is important to identify which of these issues may be causing your dog's inappropriate behavior. Each situation is different and will require unique approaches and management techniques.

Managing Your Environment

It is best if your dog lives inside with you but if your pet must spend time outside unsupervised you will need to manage your environment to create good habits. Providing an acceptable digging area for your dog can save you a lot of headaches and destroyed flower beds. Pick a place in your yard that you are going to allow your dog to dig and create a digging playground. A digging playground should have soft soil and you should keep it clean from debris. You can bury safe and enticing items for your pet and encourage him to find them. This will positively reinforce him to dig in his special area. If you catch your dog digging in unacceptable areas interrupt the behavior with a loud clap of your hands and redirect him to his playground. Offer lots of verbal praise if you catch your dog digging in the area you have provided.

If your dog is digging around or under the fence and excavating escape routes you will need to ensure his safety by creating a secure fence line. Modifying your fence may take some work on your part. Some suggestions: You can bury chain link fencing below your current fence to add an extra two feet of depth protection. Try laying chain link (you may also use chicken wire) out flat from the bottom of your fence a few feet. If you put this a couple inches under the ground when your dog digs he will reach the chain link quickly.

Your dog will not enjoy this experience and if the behavior ceases to be rewarding your dog will unlikely continue the behavior. You can try creating a barrier around the bottom of your fence with large stones or cinder blocks. Smaller stones or gravel (one to two feet wide and a few inches deep) around a fence line will also make an unattractive digging area.

If your dog is expressing predatory behaviors (hunting) by digging, you may have burrowing animals (moles or insects) in your yard. In order to control the digging you have to get rid of the cause. Calling in a professional may be necessary to rid your yard of any unwelcome visitors. Use caution and only use methods of removal that will not be toxic or harmful to your pet.

Encouraging Appropriate Behavior

There are lots of things you can do to help your pet make good choices. It is up to you to train your dog or puppy and start him off on the right paw! Limiting his ability to make mistakes will prevent bad habits from forming. Set him up for success.

- Always supervise your pet when he is outside.
- Sign up for a basic dog obedience class (you can call 954-266-6855 to register for a low cost class at the Humane Society of Broward County).
- Be aware of breed characteristics. Terrier breeds were bred to dig, so have realistic expectations.
- Provide plenty of one- on- one time with your pet.
- Ensure your dog or puppy is getting enough exercise and play time (see the Exercise handout for more info.).
- Provide plenty of interesting toys and activities to keep your dog busy when he is alone.
- If your dog must spend unsupervised time outside make sure he has adequate shade from the hot sun (a baby pool filled with water can help your pet stay cool too) and a comfortable shelter that will provide protection from cold weather, wind and or rain.

Avoiding the Pitfalls

Using punishment after the fact will not correct the undesired behavior and may result in other behavior problems emerging. Even if caught in the act physical punishment will not address the cause of the behavior and could even make things worse.

- Your dog or puppy may learn to be afraid of you.
- He may become defensive and develop aggressive behaviors.
- He could shy away from physical interactions with you, like not wanting to be petted.
- Fearful behaviors will influence future training and make learning difficult for your pet.