



HUMANE SOCIETY OF BROWARD COUNTY Behavior Modification Handout

Escape Behaviors in Dogs

Door dashing, digging under the fence and climbing or jumping over the fence are common escape behaviors in dogs. Dogs are motivated to escape confinement for a multitude of reasons. If your pet has not been spayed or neutered these behaviors may be magnified by their desire to seek out a mate. Some dogs may be owner searching; if they are not comfortable being alone they will panic and attempt to find you. Other dogs just find that the grass is always greener on the other side. Everything outside the house and outside the yard is more exciting and irresistible. Squirrels, rabbits, trees and sticks oh my!

Starting Off on the Right Paw / Managing Your Environment

Creating a safe and secure environment that is stimulating and enriching will reduce the desire for your pet to look for entertainment elsewhere. Having your pet spayed or neutered will also help keep him close to home by curbing the instinct to roam. A basic dog obedience class is a great way to begin the training process with your dog and set a firm foundation for future training. Having control of your pet is necessary to eliminate and manage escape behaviors. Make sure everyone in the family is on the same page when it comes to training, be pro-active and anticipate behaviors. If you know your dog has shown door dashing behaviors before he will probably do it again. Be prepared to physically manage your dog before you even open the door.

Training a non-compatible behavior is also a critical part of controlling and preventing escape behaviors. Think about what would you like your dog to do when opening doors and going in and out. A good choice would be to have him sit politely 2 – 3 feet from the doorway while being greeted. Create an invisible threshold for how close your dog can come up to the door, the further he is away the less tempting it will be to run out. Work on training a good reliable sit cue in addition to eliminating unintentional reinforcement (ignore the behavior you don't like and reward the behaviors you do like).

If this behavior has been allowed in the past and left unattended, controlling it will take some time and patience. It may even get worse before it gets better. This is just part of the learning process. Don't give in and don't give up.

Leaving your dog unattended in the yard is a good way for him to get bored and start to practice escape behaviors (digging out or jumping the fence). You should always supervise your dog while he is outside. Not only will this keep him out of trouble (digging up the flower beds) but you will be able to avert any escape attempts and redirect his behavior to something fun. Toss the ball or have a game of tug with your dog's favorite toy.

Tips and Hints

- You should never use physical punishment when correcting escape behaviors. You want your dog to want and enjoy coming to you when called. If he is greeted with a smack on the behind he will be fearful of coming to you because of the anticipation of punishment.
- Punishment may also create other fearful behaviors. Fearful behaviors will influence future training and make learning difficult for your pet.
- Your 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.
- 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).
- 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.).
- Have your pet spayed or neutered.
- Always supervise your dog when he is outside.
- Train a reliable re-call cue. Your dog should come to you when he is off leash. This will make retrieving your pet easier if he has an escape mistake.
- Train a wait cue. Your dog should be able to wait briefly at doorways and gates for you to give the ok for him to enter or exit.