

Charlestown Animal Hospital, PLLC

23 Main St., PO Box 330 • Charlestown, NH 03603

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CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR NEW PUPPY!

Something cute and fuzzy.....but what a big responsibility! The first 4-8 months are usually very busy with vet visits, house training, obedience training, socialization, exercise, etc. Not only do you need to address your current situation, but you need to plan for many possible futures your pet might have: babies/kids, other pets, closer neighbors, leash-walking, car rides, boarding/hospitalization (say crate training, even temporarily...), etc. The biggest tip we can give you is: **the more time you can put into guiding your new friend in the right direction now, the better he/she will fit into your lifestyle and the less work you will need to do in the future to maintain the wonderful bond you are just starting to share.**

The veterinary aspect of puppyhood involves vaccinations, deworming, heartworm prevention, flea and tick prevention, spaying/neutering, +/- microchipping. We will also be discussing feeding, house-training, and normal puppy behavior including pack dynamics and establishing leadership with minimal conflict. We will have a number of handouts and pamphlets for you to read. Most of them are fairly easy to read, and hopefully easy to understand, but please ask if you have any questions about what you are reading or discussing during your visits, or if there are topics that have not been covered that interest you.

Additionally, we recommend getting a good book (or two or three) on raising a puppy. Even veteran dog owners might learn new things about their fuzzy companions.

The Art of Raising a Puppy by the Monks of New Skete is an excellent starter book. (The monks raise and train dogs in their monastery in the town of New Skete in upstate New York, but the book sticks to d-o-g instead of g-o-d.)

Cesar Milan also seems to have a good understanding of dog behavior, so would be an author to look for.

In general, we recommend finding resources that support positive reinforcement instead of punishment for training this new best friend, as well as ones that help you to understand your puppy so you can be more effective in finding the right motivation and guiding in the best way. We look forward to working with you, now and in the future, to make this new puppy a great addition to your family.

So, again, congratulations on your new puppy!

Office Hours by Appointment - 24 Hour Emergency Coverage

Dr. Claire M. Lindo, DVM

Desmond Muthus, DVM

Mgr. Rezá Marukelli, CCBW, MAH

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Deworming Guidelines For Dogs



Puppies

- * Every 2 weeks until 3 months of age
- * Once/month from 3 to 6 months
- * Four times/year after 6 months of age



Adult

- * Treat regularly considering potential exposure to parasites
- * A continued surveillance of parasite prevalence in your area is recommended



Pregnant and Lactating Dogs

- * Lactating dogs should be treated concurrently with puppies



Newly aquired Puppies or Dogs

- * Immediately, then repeat after 2 weeks, then follow guidelines above.



Information provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Strategic deworming is a practice recommended by the American Association of Veterinary Parasitologists (AAVP) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).



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BOND

1 Be Positive

Focusing on positive behaviors is critical to success.

Reward your dog with a tummy rub, a tasty treat or a toy when they show calm and relaxed behavior.

Do not reprimand undesired behaviors that happen when you're away, including past inappropriate behaviors.

2 Only Reward Calm Behavior

Ignore attention-seeking behaviors and reinforce calm behaviors.

Look for opportunities to spend relaxed time with your dog, such as cuddling on the couch.

Spend time with your dog only when he is calm.

Include daily walks and play time in your schedule whenever possible.

3 No More Drama When You Come And Go

Grabbing your keys or coat can be a signal that creates anxiety, resulting in undesired behaviors.

When You're at Home: Prepare to leave when you're not going anywhere. Grab your keys, put on your coat, walk to the door but then return to your previous activity.

When You Leave: 20-30 minutes before going out, give your dog a favorite distraction (toy or treat). Ignore your dog until it's time to leave, then simply walk out without speaking to or giving your dog any attention.

When You Return: Ignore your dog until he calms down and then reinforce this positive behavior.

4 Develop Your Dog's Independence

Help your dog learn to relax while you're away.

Provide a "safe place," such as a small rug, for your dog to be calm; teach him to settle and stay there for increasing periods of time.

Gradually increase time and distance separating you from your dog and follow recommendations from steps #1 and #2 to reward calm behavior.

Basic Handling of Puppies and Kittens

We now know that the first **6 months** of a new kitten or puppy's life is the **critical** time period for handling and socialization. So what does this mean? Why is it important to you?

Most of us have met pets that are happy to let anyone touch them, hold the collar, check their ears, look at their teeth, trim their nails, pick or wash fuzzy junk off the coat, etc. The well-behaved type is easy to care for, a pleasure to be around, and gets better care because they are easier (and less expensive) to check over regularly.

And most of us have also met pets that are sweet *until* you try any one of those things and then they either freak out or turn into Cujo. The freak out/Cujo type sometimes hurts people, they cost a lot more because sedatives or anesthesia have to be part of even minor problems, and they get inferior care because they make such a production out of everything.

The major difference between these 2 types of pet has to do with how they were handled when young.

What's the key to get a new pet that is well-adjusted and bomb-proof?

Part of the key is that while babies are born with some pre-programmed information, much of what they do as adults they *learned* during puppyhood. They can learn to be prima donnas that refuse to be fussed with, or they can just as easily learn that you, your whole family, and humans in general are going to touch every part of their bodies, and it is really no big deal.

How do we teach them that being touched is no big deal, nothing to worry or freak out about, not to be sensitive?

Some experts say that the best way to de-sensitize is to repeat an experience 100 times. The first 10-20 times the pet will probably wiggle, by 35 times they don't wiggle but they are still paying attention to what you are doing, and by 100 times they are so comfortable and unconcerned with the touch that they are often looking at other things around them while you are touching them.

What do we touch? When do we start?

Start touching your pet right from the moment you bring it home. Touch every part of your pet that you would be comfortable touching on yourself, and in the same way. Don't like fingers touching your eyeballs or up your nose? Okay, don't put your fingers in your pet's eyes or up its nose, either. But *gently* passing your hands over the face, your fingers over the eyelids, touching the ear flaps, etc is perfectly acceptable. Touch the skin everywhere, from head to rump to belly to toenails. Bend and straighten the toes, the wrists, the elbows, the shoulders, the hocks, the knees, and the hips *in the directions they normally move*. Hold onto the tail. Pick up the hind legs to "wheelbarrow". Pick up the front end to "reach for the sky". Use the nose as a handle and then tip the head right, left, up, down. Lift the lips and open the mouth to check out all the teeth. Open and close the eyelids. Turn your pet on its back, and hold it there until it gives a big sigh of acceptance (then let it up with a "good puppy!"). Do it all gently but persistently over and over and over again until your pet is so used to it all that it doesn't really care.

Is there a maintenance program? Yes, make it a *daily* routine to do a quick once-over for the first year.

PS. You're also creating a great bond with your pet. In households where one person does the handling and one person doesn't, the pets tend to seek out and listen better to the touching person!

Basic Socialization of Puppies

We now know that the first **6 months** of a new puppy's life is the **critical** time period for socialization. Why does this matter?

Most of us have seen dogs that are happy and content everywhere they go. They are friendly but not overwhelming to visitors to their homes. They ride calmly in the car. They are confident exploring new places with their families. They've "never seen a stranger, just a friend they haven't met yet". They greet other animals politely and play well with other dogs. They behave with cats and kids and farm animals. These dogs make it easy to invite friends to your home and are welcome to go with you to visit other people's homes or go to outside social events. They are welcome at Doggie Daycare and the boarding kennel, but half a dozen friends will take them home for a week for free while you take a vacation.

The major difference between these 2 types of pet is what they were exposed to when they were under 6 months of age.

What's the key to a pet that is well-adjusted and "bomb-proof"?

Part of the key is that while some dogs are just calmer than others, adult dogs are comfortable with whatever they learned was pleasant to do as a puppy. If they saw lots of nice people and nice other dogs and had comfortable rides in the car going to fun new places, their expectation when they see new people, pets, and places will be that it will be fun again. If they never saw anything but their own home and own family members, then new people and places might be very different and therefore very scary.

What should puppies experience? When do we start?

Starting the first day they come home, puppies should have good experiences: greeting new people, greeting other dogs, playing with other dogs, seeing cats (without chasing them), walking past large animals, riding in the car, going to new places – other homes, fields, the park, parking lots, athletic events, the fair, the groomer, and boarding kennel/doggie daycare. Pet or use food treats to coax shy puppies and to reward puppies who are curious, calm, and happy. What you do in the pup's first 6 months sets the path for life.

How do we teach them that new things are okay, tolerable at the least and quite possibly actually fun?

Socialization is just like other training. We need to make time to socialize frequently and repeatedly, arrange who or what we are seeing, plan the time so the fun isn't forced or rushed, have motivating rewards for desired behavior, and know when to end the session. Sometimes socialization for the puppy can mesh nicely with social plans for the humans, like running an errand or watching the kids' ball game. Other times we need to focus on our puppy's experience and keep the experiences positive. Ten second good experiences are much better than ½ hour mediocre ones. The primary goal must be to set up our puppies to succeed.

NOTE: Do NOT reward (treat, pet, cuddle, say "it's okay" to) puppies who are acting fearful (barking, growling, snarling, biting) – this gets a firm "NO!". Treating, petting, etc is *encouraging* your pup to do *more* of it, so be clear with your pup that you do *not* want that.

PS. Puppy Class gives you car rides, new places, new people, other dogs, and play time, all in one, plus a trainer to supervise!

5

Housetraining Pitfalls

Housetraining is more difficult than most people realize, and it's much more difficult with some dogs than others. It tends to be hardest with the smallest dogs. It's the first complicated task most people teach their dogs, and many dogs lose their homes over housetraining problems.

Pitfalls to Avoid

1. Leaving a not-yet-housetrained dog loose in the house, without staying in the same room and watching the dog.
2. Punishing in housetraining. For some dogs, scolding—even a dirty look from you—is enough to throw housetraining off track.
3. Not taking the dog out often enough.
4. Not treating accident spots with the right type of product.
5. Adopting a dog who lacks the physical ability to meet the housetraining conditions you want.
6. Postponing housetraining for a more convenient time.
7. Failing to give a puppy experience eliminating on the surfaces you will want the dog to use later.
8. Continuing an indoor method for too long if reliability about not soiling the house is your goal.
9. Feeding problems including leaving food out all the time, feeding a high-fiber dog food, and giving treats that throw the dog's body off track.
10. Not getting the dog medical care for orthopedic, parasitic, stress diarrhea, anxiety disorders, or other physical problems.
11. Crating for too many hours, either regularly or even in some cases just once.
12. Expecting the dog to ask to go out.
13. Housetraining two dogs at once.
14. Keeping two small male dogs together who become "dueling tinklers," and then blaming the dogs.
15. Expecting a dog to actually understand housetraining.
16. Taking housetraining accidents as personal insults toward you from the dog.
17. Thinking the dog is doing it out of spite.
18. Thinking the dog feels guilty because of dog body language that is actually submissiveness.

We recommend:

1. Taking puppies to your chosen spot *immediately* after waking, within 15-20 minutes after every meal, and otherwise *hourly* during the first 3-4 months of its life. These are the common limits of a puppy's bladder and bowels. Set your puppy up to succeed by acknowledging and working within the confines of his/her physical limitations. Use the fact that dogs use "scent-posts" to decide where to eliminate – urine and BM odors tell a puppy 'this is a safe spot so go right here'.
2. Tether your puppy to you or confine him/her to a small enough space so you can adequately monitor it for sniffing and circling before it squats, or catch the squatting before elimination occurs.
If caught "in the act" you can say simply "Puppy, NO", immediately bring him/her to your chosen spot, and praise like crazy or give treats when elimination happens there. You are not scolding for eliminating; you are giving simple guidance for *where* to eliminate.
If an accident is found after the fact, do not sigh, groan, stomp, yell, or draw the puppy's attention to it. Absolutely do not put his/her face in it. (This is not your puppy's fault; you are the most intelligent one of the group, so it is **YOUR accident** for not managing your puppy's needs to better suit your own. But be kind and patient with your puppy and with yourself – this is a learning process.) Find a neutral way to remove the puppy from the area so you can clean the mess without "help". Remember that the motions of cleaning up a mess are similar to the motions of engaging your puppy in play – don't add to your frustration by confusing your puppy about your intentions toward the stuff on the floor.

Accidents on hard surfaces can be cleaned with common cleaners or soap and water, not just drying up the spot with paper towels. Messes on carpets need to be blotted and either cleaned with lots of soap and water followed by blotting again, or saturated with an enzyme odor eliminator product. It is important to prevent a scent-post at this spot, or your pup will return here.

3. If you cannot monitor your puppy closely enough or take him/her out often enough, then provide an alternative surface inside to eliminate on, or for small dogs, get a doggie litter box. Realize that puppies learn to go on *surfaces*, not necessarily by what vertical objects are around them.

Inside, puppies that are not monitored closely will learn that whatever flooring material is in your home is okay to go on, because they do it over and over and nothing bad happens *during* the elimination. This is hard to un-learn! Puppies that are confined to a papered area will quickly learn that newspaper is an okay surface to go on, but interestingly enough don't learn that the linoleum underneath is okay to go on, because they are not experiencing the linoleum, under the paper, under their feet. If they routinely pee on paper by the stove, and you move the paper over to the fridge instead (and wash the floor by the stove so there is no "scent-post"), these puppies will go on the newspaper by the fridge but not on the linoleum by the stove. They learn what *surfaces* are safe and react accordingly.

Set your puppy up to succeed with paper-training by covering the entire area with paper. If your pup has used the paper for soiling, i.e. he/she has found it to be *safe*, after 2 weeks you can decrease the papering to ½ of the area. If he/she has even 1 accident off the paper, go back to papering everything for another 2 weeks. As long as he/she has no accidents, you can reduce the area of paper by ½ every week or 2 weeks. Eventually you have a 1-newspaper plot, and can start moving it toward the door, or if training outside has been getting better, you can stop putting down the paper altogether.

It is very important to continue to take the puppy outside as often as possible to eliminate if you wish the pup to learn to go outside, too. They can learn to go on more than 1 type of surface, but they must have good experiences of going on all surfaces you want them to use in the future.

4. *Teaching* your puppy to give you a signal for going outside. Some puppies naturally come to you, bring their leashes, or dance around or whine or bark or paw at you to communicate that they want to go outside. Others do not, which can make housetraining harder. For those puppies, some can be taught to ring a bell (or to speak) each and every time he/she goes outside. This now gives them a way to alert you to the desire to go outside. You *must* respect each and every time they initiate going outside by actually taking them immediately, in order for them to learn that this cue gets them out the door.

There is Help

If this doesn't give the help you need, go to a qualified professional. The biggest pitfall of all is to consider housetraining easy and to look for someone to blame when it doesn't go well. To succeed with housetraining, the dog's body and mind must be capable of holding it to get to your chosen spot to eliminate. You'll have to be skilled at the kind of dog handling and management this dog needs. And you must have the time and place to get the dog frequent enough elimination opportunities for housetraining. The longer you wait to get help, the more your dog can suffer in the long term.

Give housetraining your very best. Give it your most positive and loving effort. How you handle housetraining will be at the core of your dog's beliefs about you. Make of it an opportunity to let your dog learn to count on you. Use housetraining to help build a rich and rewarding relationship with your dog.

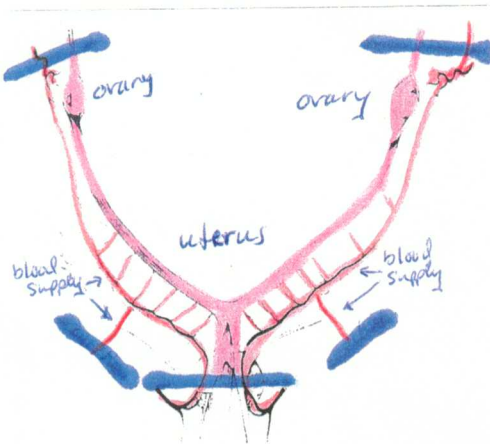
Notice of a Change in our Spay Procedure:

We are changing our routine Spay procedure from the ovariohysterectomy to an ovariectomy. All other components of our perioperative procedures will remain the same.

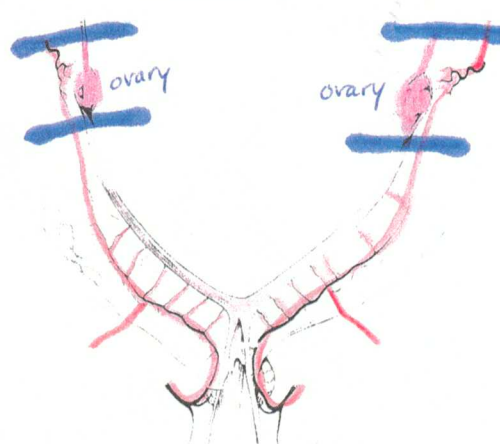
So what's the difference between an ovariohysterectomy and an ovariectomy?

The ovariohysterectomy involves removal of the uterus along with both ovaries while the ovariectomy involves removal of only the two ovaries. Any procedure to remove a part of the repro tract must also deal with its blood vessels. See the pictures below. The blood vessels are red, and each thick blue line represents a suture to tie off the blood supply so the pet does not bleed when the associated part is removed.

The ovariohysterectomy



The ovariectomy



So, why change?

1) The usual spay procedure in the US is a full ovariohysterectomy, and we know the benefits of spaying by removing the uterus with the ovaries include eliminating the risks of uterine infection and uterine cancer (from the uterus) along with an end to heat cycles and ovarian cancer (from the ovaries). Surprisingly, in Europe where the procedure is "only" an ovariectomy, the benefits of the spay are exactly the same, even though the uterus is left behind. It turns out the hormones from the ovaries are the instigator in *uterine* diseases, and once the ovaries are gone, the uterus no longer has the great risks of infection or cancer.

2) This procedure is neither new nor experimental, but is a time-tested and standard surgical option in the global veterinary field.

3) The ovariectomy (OVE) is technically slightly easier and a slightly shorter procedure than the ovariohysterectomy (OVH), needing a slightly smaller incision with slightly less risk of complications. This means it is easier on your doctor **and** your pet.

Is there anyone who should still have the "old" ovariohysterectomy instead of the "new" ovariectomy? Yes! The uterus should be removed from your pet if:

- 1) She might be pregnant (and we are aborting the embryos) - Has your cat/dog been through heat yet? If yes, has she been unsupervised outside **at all** or been with a male since going into heat?
- 2) She has uterine disease (infection/cancer)
- 3) You wish for her to have the original procedure.

If your pet is scheduled for a spay today, she will be getting an ovariectomy (OVE) **unless**:
you inform us of her potential pregnancy or uterine disease, or we already know of the uterine disease,
you request the ovariohysterectomy (OVH) or
the doctor finds she needs the OVH based on direct observation of her reproductive tract.

Preventive Stomach Tacking (Prophylactic Gastropexy)

Stomach tacking, or gastropexy, is a surgical procedure to prevent stomach torsion (a very painful and life-threatening condition where the stomach fills with gas and/or food and then twists, blocking off all outflow of the stomach and more importantly blocking blood flow, causing shock and death). Torsion is also called **GDV**, for **G**astric (stomach) **D**ilation (overstretching) and **V**olvulus (twisting). Gastropexy is usually performed after successful surgery to untwist and empty the stomach so that it does not happen again, i.e. the pet has suffered a GDV and will live to tell about it due to prompt medical attention including rapid IV fluids, some medications, and surgery.

The tacking surgery can also be done preventively (prophylactically) **before** an animal has had any episode of bloating or twisting. Owners of dogs that are more susceptible to bloating can elect to have the stomach tacked when the pet is in for other surgery, like spaying or neutering, or even as a separate procedure all its own. The procedure is called tacking because the stomach is permanently stitched, or "tacked", to the area it normally rests against on the body wall, effectively preventing the stomach from ever twisting.

Gastropexy does NOT necessarily prevent stomach bloat, or filling with excessive gas or food like an overstretched balloon. Bloat is also a serious condition, but because it rarely blocks the return blood flow to the heart as quickly or as severely, it is not as quickly fatal as torsion. In general, with bloat you have more time to recognize your pet's illness and a much better chance of survival with treatment. For dogs at risk of GDV, "only" being able to bloat is a less risky condition.

Dogs most at risk for GDV are deep-chested large-breed dogs, especially if they eat one large meal a day and play right after eating. Most commonly affected are Great Danes, Weimaraners, Gordon Setters, Irish Setters, Saint Bernards, Doberman Pinschers, Old English Sheepdogs, Standard Poodles, and Basset Hounds. However, any dog that has a deep chest and eats large volumes of food and/or water, including gorging on the bag of dog food, getting into garbage or gas-producing stuff outside, (like compost, swamp water, or rotten vegetation), or stealing a large grinder when you are only a 10 lb Dachshund! can be at greater risk of bloat and GDV.

Strategies for preventing GDV include: dividing feeding into more than one meal per day, discouraging "tanking up" on water at one go, not allowing play for at least 1 hour after eating, feeding a good quality food so your dog doesn't need to eat as much at each meal, and prophylactic gastropexy.

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Christmas Tree Tips

It is now the holiday season and with that comes shiny things on trees. As you can imagine, this can be a BIG problem if this is your pet's first time seeing a tree, whether it is real or fake. Here are a couple of tips that may help prevent a huge mess.

- When you first get your real or fake tree set up, either set it in a VERY sturdy tree holder or try to anchor it to the ceiling. This will prevent the tree from tipping or falling down should your pet try to climb it.

- Let your tree just sit there for a few days (I find 3 days to be the magic number). This gives your pet a chance to climb the tree without knocking down all of your bulbs, lights, or garland. This also gives you a chance to see how your stand or ceiling hooks hold up to test of being climbed.

- After you've decorated your tree, hang some cheap or tough homemade bulbs/toys on the very bottom branches of your tree. Encourage your pet to play with these and not the shiny ones on the higher branches. If they knock one of these down, do not scold them as this just tells them to try for another and that one may be a breakable one. Instead, just pick it up and hang it back on tree.

- Avoid having the garland or ribbons you may use to wrap around your tree having obvious ends showing. If they see that, they will try to snag it and run away to play with it like a piece of string and may cause damage. Also try to avoid putting tinsel (if you must use it) on the lower branches where your pet may be able to grab it and eat it. This can cause blockages and severe illnesses if it gets stuck in the GI tract of your pet.

- When watering your tree be aware that no matter what you do, your pet will almost ALWAYS find a way to drink the water. So you should avoid putting harmful products in the water that may cause sickness; such as aspirin, bleach, viagra, etc... (don't laugh some people do use it). Also to that effect, do not spray you tree with hairspray or any other products that may harm your pet as he or she will eat/chew on the branches.

- Finally, when setting presents around your tree, make sure to leave gaps or holes for your pet to roam through so that he or she does not have to jump on or through the presents (tearing them to shreds...). There should be at least 3 holes or gaps for them to travel through. Certain packages should be put out as late/close to Christmas as possible. This includes wrapped cloth or soft items, baked goods, treats, or anything with a smell. Pets can smell these things through the paper and they may become a favorite for pets to shred/open. Be advised that some pets will just love to tear open paper and so nothing you do may prevent this behavior of them opening your presents before you are ready.

We hope that these tips help you in this coming season and help both you and your new pet to enjoy the holiday season without hardships.



UVHS Behavior Tips
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Ring the Bell to Go Outside (For housetraining your dog) By Dee Ganley & Nancy Lyon

Your dog needs a way to communicate that he /she needs to go to the bathroom. First, you need a few things:

1. A single "jingle bell" on a string long enough for your dog to touch it with his nose when hung from a doorknob. (If you have a really small dog, then purchase a hotel desk bell that sits on a counter - Staples has them for \$5.00.)
2. Food treats near the door (so your reinforcements will be readily available).

There are two different methods to train this exercise - both work well.

Method One (this first is my favorite) This method has two parts:

First: You will teach the dog a "targeting" behavior. Use the palm of your hand first. Have a bag of treats ready and your clicker too. Put your right hand out with your fingers facing the floor and visible to dog (you can rub a bit of hot dog onto the palm if you like). Once your dog sniffs your palm, then click and treat (with your other hand, of course). When your dog touches his nose to your palm any time you ask (you have done this atleast 30 times and put it on cue), then the next step is to hold the bell by the string at nose height and ask the dog to "touch" it. As soon as he rings the bell with his touch, c/t and jack pot. Now do this 20 times. Hang the bell by the string from the door handle low enough so the dog can easily touch it with his nose, ask for "touch" and then reward when he touches the bell hanging from the knob.

Second: Next we tie this behavior to going out. When you think your dog might have to go out say something like "do you have to go out?" As your dog heads towards the door, say "touch". Your dog should touch bell. If he forgets then ring it your self or just point it out to him ask again. Once he touches (ringing the bell), then give a treat and let your dog out. After you have done this 20 times, the dog is going to "ring" the bell himself. When you hear him ringing it on his own, yell out "Yes!!!" And ask, "Do you have to go out?" Let your dog out and give treat *only* if he goes to the bathroom. Make sure you put your dog on a time schedule - 2 minutes to go to the bathroom once he has been let out after ringing the bell. If he doesn't do his business in that time, put him in his crate when you come back into the house or make him lie down for 2 minutes. Otherwise you will end up with a dog that rings the bell to go out side, but doesn't need to go to the bathroom.

Method Two:

Decide on what bell you are going to use, then put it in a place so dog can get to it. Now, when your dog might need to go out ask, "do you have to go out?" When your dog gets to the door, YOU "ring" the bell. Next time you feel your dog needs to go out, again ask, "do you have to go out?" and go right to the door. Then at the door, use your finger to almost touch the bell luring the dog's nose to the bell and let him ring it. After doing this several times the dog should do it on his own. When your dog looks and nudges at it say "YES" and give him a treat. Let the dog out. Once he has gone to the bathroom, reward the dog again. I would start only allowing the dog 5 minutes to go to the bathroom. If he doesn't do anything, then put him back in crate or make him lie down for 2-3 minutes by your side. Now at some point the dog will on his own 'ring the bell'. You must get up and praise him. Give two treats the first time dog does it by himself and ask, "do you have to go out" and take the dog out. Once the dog understands to 'ring the bell' you will no longer have to give it a treat just letting it out will be enough. REMEMBER DOGS DO WHAT WORKS!

10 life-threatening behavior myths in dogs

Do you think puppy classes pose health risks? Does your dog seem to act angry with you? Do you punish your dog? If so, read on and see the truth behind these and other common misconceptions when it comes to dogs' behavior.

By Valarie V. Tynes, DVM, DACVB

Myth #1



I'm embarrassed to talk to my veterinarian about my pet's behavior. I'm afraid that I'm the cause of the problem!

A variety of factors play a role in the development of behavior problems, including a pet's genetics, early experiences, and environment. While you can certainly worsen a pet's behavior problem with inappropriate training methods, it is highly unlikely that you caused your pet's behavior problems. Many medical conditions and medications can also contribute to behavior changes, so your veterinarian is the best person to consult first when your pet exhibits worrisome behaviors.

FACT: Don't hesitate to ask your veterinarian about any problem that may affect your pet's health and well-being. Most behavior problems are at least manageable—if not

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always curable. But the sooner you seek qualified advice, the higher the likelihood you can successfully treat the problem.

Myth #2



Puppies shouldn't go to puppy classes until they have had all of their shots or they will get sick.

The critical period for socialization in dogs lasts from the fourth to the 14th week of life. During this time, dogs learn about their environment, other dogs, and people. Poorly socialized dogs are more likely to exhibit behaviors that make them unsuitable as a pet and result in relinquishment to an animal shelter or euthanasia. Thus, the likelihood of death due to poor socialization is greater than the likelihood of illness or death due to contagious disease—as long as the puppy class is managed properly. All puppy classes should

- Only mix puppies of similar age
- Require that all puppies have their first vaccination several days before the beginning of the class
- Be held on an indoor surface that can be sanitized
- Clean all puppy waste immediately and disinfect the soiled area

- Not allow any puppies into the class that show signs of illness.

FACT: Proper early socialization can save a dog's life and is the best way to ensure that you end up with a pet that is well adjusted and a joy to live with for many years.

Myth #3



My dog is aggressive/fearful/shy because he/she was abused as a puppy.

While this may be a possibility in the case of some re-homed dogs whose exact histories are unknown, the most common cause of fearful behavior in dogs is inadequate or inappropriate early socialization. Fearful behavior is also heritable, so some dogs are born with a predisposition to shyness or fearfulness. Proper socialization may be even more critical in these individuals.

FACT: No matter the cause, dogs that exhibit fearful or anxious behavior frequently may be suffering and should be evaluated by a veterinarian. These animals can be helped in many different ways.

Myth #4



I want that new medication I heard about to treat my pet's <insert behavior problem here>.

Medications alone rarely completely solve a behavior problem. Behavior modification and environmental modification are usually necessary to achieve long-term, lasting improvement. Some medications have been shown to increase the speed with which the behavior modification takes effect and can be considered another useful tool in treating behavior problems, but they are not the sole remedy.

FACT: Medications can play an important role in the treatment of a behavior problem but only if used appropriately as a part of a complete treatment plan.

Myth #5



Dogs that are aggressive are acting dominant.

While some dogs truly exhibit dominance aggression, they are much rarer than the popular media would have you believe. The problem with outdated dominance theories is that they result in the recommendation of confronta-

tional styles of training based on the erroneous belief that owners have to physically dominate their dogs. Not only is this dangerous, but it is usually ineffective and has resulted in damage to the human-animal bond far more often than it has led to success.

FACT: Most dogs with aggression problems are anxious or afraid and are more likely to respond to reward-based training under the supervision of a qualified animal behaviorist or board-certified veterinary behaviorist.

Myth #6



He must be angry with me. He knows what he did was wrong.

Many dogs show submissive behaviors when their owners arrive home. These behaviors of tucking the tail, lowering the ears, avoiding eye contact, and slinking away do not mean "I am sorry" in dog language. They mean "Quit acting angry at me." They mean that the dog has learned to associate the return of people to the home with the presence of feces, garbage, or other destroyed items on the floor. The dog is not angry—he is afraid because in the past when people arrived and these items were on the floor, he was yelled at or hit. Even if the dog was not yelled at or hit, the angry body language of the human is clear to the dog, and the dog still learns to feel fear when people arrive. Punishment in these circumstances does not teach the dog anything (except to fear the arrival of people). The dog is completely incapable of associating any punishment

with the behavior he performed minutes or hours before.

FACT: Dogs do not eliminate on the floor or destroy items out of spite. The most likely cause of the behavior is anxiety or lack of appropriate exercise and stimulation (or incomplete housetraining). Rather than being angry at your dog, seek help from a professional. Your dog may be suffering.

Myth #7



If you use treats to train a dog, you will always need them to get the dog to obey your commands.

The principles that govern the laws of learning have shown this to be completely untrue. Treats are an excellent means of reinforcing a behavior. Clear and consistent reinforcement is necessary when you initially begin teaching any animal a new behavior. For some animals, a vocal reward, toys, or petting may serve as good reinforcers, but food is for many animals the most salient reinforcement there is. The rules of learning show that when first teaching a new behavior, reinforcing every single time the behavior is performed on cue will lead to the fastest rate of learning. Once a behavior is learned, intermittent reinforcement is the best means of maintaining the behavior and making it most resistant to extinction. This means that you only have to use the treats periodically once the behavior is learned.

People who believe that an animal is not responding because it knows there is no treat available have usually failed