

Submissive Wetting in Dogs

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There are many dogs, especially young puppies, who urinate when approached or greeted. This is a fairly easy problem to solve, if properly understood. Unintentional urination is an emotional response and is a dog's way of expressing submission or excitement. It is not a housebreaking problem, and will be prolonged and complicated if treated as such.

Very young puppies are rolled on their backs by their mothers. The bitch licks the puppy's abdomen to stimulate urination and defecation. As the pup gets more mature, it's natural response to her dominant approach is to roll over and urinate, so the mother knows she does not have to go through the process of assisting.

In instances of extreme stress, this natural response to dominance often resurfaces. It normally goes away as the puppy matures and gains confidence. However, if a dog gets over-excited or frightened, such wetting can recur. Since the behavior is an indication of stress, correcting it would increase the stress level even higher, and compound the problem. And, since this wetting is comparable to waving the white flag, punishing the dog for this "accident" would be like shooting a surrendering soldier.

It is common to acquire a new puppy at seven or eight weeks of age. The eighth through tenth weeks of development are known as the "fear-imprint" period. This is about the time when many new pet owners are avidly trying to housebreak the new arrival. Harsh, negative corrections for housebreaking mistakes are often the reason for the submissive urination problem.

The most effective solution is to make every attempt to appear less dominant or threatening by crouching at a distance, rather than approaching. Also the voice should be kept soft and slow, with no sudden movements. Slowly extend a low welcoming hand and hold it still. Let the dog do the approaching, while speaking in soft, reassuring tones.

Repeat this calm, low-key greeting often, so the dog becomes conditioned to the fact that it is not a threat. If you greet the dog a dozen times within a minute, it should be affected less and less each time. This will desensitize the dog to overreacting, and help to convince it that an approach, or arm reach, is not a threat.

Some dogs may urinate submissively only when one particular individual approaches. This may be someone who has over-disciplined or frightened the dog; or it may merely be someone who is unusually tall or has a loud, deep voice. It may simply be a person who has a habit of grabbing at, or leaning over, the dog. That individual must repeat the above procedure often in order to earn the dog's trust.

Another common circumstance occurs when the owner comes home and offers a very emotional greeting which over-excites the dog. The best solution here is to get the dog outside without greeting it. Ignore the dog until he relaxes and adjusts to the owner's presence. Then, calmly crouch and say hello in the quiet manner described above.

During the reconditioning process, a patient, positive attitude is crucial. Dogs are very attuned to body language and moods. Quicker success will be attained if the person's attitude is reassuring.