



# Module 11 : Typical Dog Behaviour

- Socialisation
- How dogs change with age
- Understanding puppy behaviour
- Feeding time

Module 11 will help you understand typical dog behaviour, particularly the following points:

- Socialisation
- How dogs change with age
- Understanding puppy behaviour
- Feeding time

## 11.1 Socialisation

**Dogs are highly social creatures and are capable of interacting well with other dogs and with humans.**

Dogs do not naturally live in packs, as previously thought, but rather in loose social groups with dogs coming and going as they want. They are well adapted to living in a human household group. In addition to the humans, a home can have a variety of pets, and it is possible for your dog to live quite amicably with most other creatures.

Typical dog behaviour is to socialise with other animals, as well as with you.

They enjoy the affection and friendship which makes up their family. However, not all dogs will have the same socialisation behaviours. There are also issues with socialisation across species. For example, it can be difficult to socialise a dog with a cat; however, with some effort, it can be achieved.

Introducing two animals of a different species when they are both young can help reinforce the family relationship.

Socialisation can also be trained out of pets. By keeping your pets in an all-human household, you can see a change in socialisation behaviours. Instead of a dog going up to smell another and start a friendly relationship, there can be a fearful or aggressive reaction. Evidence has been seen in dog barks, where dogs without socialisation can be aggressive, vocal, and use posturing to warn other dogs. Some dogs may be extremely nervous, try to hide or get into your arms when another dog is near them in a social setting.

Socialisation is also about learning. When you read the module on how dogs learn, you will also discover about social learning reinforcing behaviours. Remember that while socialisation can be an inherited trait, there are always different personalities with any species.

## 11.2 How Dogs Change with Age



**Just as we change as we age, you must expect that your dog is also going to change as they age.**

There are many changes, both physical and behavioural, that you will observe in your dog. Physical changes can affect your pet's behaviour. If you do not feel well, you tend to have different behaviour. Perhaps you sleep more, your temper is short, or you push through and ignore the pain or illness until you cannot anymore. You might avoid certain activities because of pain, such as avoiding tennis if you have inflamed the tendon in your elbow.

How your dog feels physically will determine their behaviour, as well as their emotions, anxieties or worries that they may have.

Dogs, particularly smaller breeds, can also develop heart troubles. Cancer, arthritis, or pain from any injuries sustained will affect the dog's behaviour.

Your dog will have nutritional and weight changes much like humans. Puppies need to eat a lot to help with their growing bodies. Older dogs need a decrease in the amount of food, but they also need different nutrients to keep obesity and weight loss at a minimum. For older dogs, you should

increase their fibre and lower their fat content.

Hair, skin and even their paws can change. Older dogs tend to lose hair, can become thinner and are often injured more easily. Some dogs have benign tumours that grow on their skin. Calluses form, on larger breeds, at the elbows and on their paws, which can be uncomfortable. Nails will become brittle which you will notice when you clip their nails. The nails also require more regular clipping to prevent breakage and further damage. Older dogs can also be less active, which means their nails are not naturally worn down as they walk and play.

Changes in a dog's mobility can indicate a reason for its behaviour. Arthritis and intervertebral disc disease are common in older dogs. These changes can be debilitating and painful.

Dental diseases may change the behaviour of eating. A dog may become slimmer because they are not eating appropriately. Signs of gum disease may become noticeable if the dog does not receive proper care as it ages.

Other changes can be gastrointestinal, such as constipation. The immune system may not be performing properly, making your dog more susceptible to diseases.

All of these physical changes the dog experiences as it gets older, plus a few not mentioned, can also be reflected in the dog's behaviour. It is easier to fix these issues and the behaviour that comes from them by providing a dog with proper health and dental care. Furthermore, if a dog is starting to suffer from certain mobility, eating or other physical issues, certain accommodations can be made to assist them through their ailments. They can be picked up and carried, their food can be changed to something easier to digest and many various other changes can also be made.

There are some nerve cell changes that a dog may experience. As an animal gets older, nerve cells die off, without being replaced. Some dogs can also see a reduction of proteins that surround the nerve cells. It can alter the communication a dog's internal system has between the brain and other functions. Scientists call this cognitive dysfunction. Confusion, disorientation, loss of training skills, restless nights, decreased attentiveness, decreased activity levels, and not recognising family/owners can occur.

Older dogs are also known to have increased stress levels. It is due to an inability to handle stress that makes a dog more anxious than previously. Dogs have been known to show more aggression, separation anxiety, noise phobias and increased vocalisation as they age.

Any change in behaviour should be assessed, analysed and viewed by a vet.

## 11.3 Understanding Puppy Behaviour



**Puppies are like infants. Young offspring of any species need time to learn appropriate behaviours.**

It is up to the owner, the learned species, to understand puppy behaviour and train responses that are acceptable. There are certain puppy traits that you will think are cute. For example, wobbly legs, tiny little play barks, clumsiness, and this cute little shadow that follows you everywhere are all adorable. You will love it, but all of this can become just as un-cute as it was cute. Rather than finding a shadow enjoyable, you may get upset that you are constantly tripping over your new pet. Of course, you understand there is a reason for their behaviour, but when it stops being cute it may be too late for you to condition an appropriate set of normal behaviours.

In Module 12, you are going to learn about how dogs learn. A highlight from that module is that dogs learn by observation and hand gestures. They are visual learners and are also able to learn vocal commands like "sit." As with most species, puppies are at an age where they are learning everything around them, soaking it up like a sponge, and developing traits that will last a lifetime. You can make a real impact on their future behaviour at this time by training and socialising them.

Problem behaviours can include barking, biting, nipping, chewing, peeing indoors, acting aggressively and crying all night. These behaviours are normal, but they are not wanted when they can interrupt sleep, daily habits or ruin a home.

Puppies also have behaviours that may be worrisome. They may get endless hiccups, whine, breath erratically, twitch while sleeping, develop upset tummies or suffer fits when left alone. This is normal behaviour brought about by enjoying life and their surroundings, but also missing you when you have to go to work.

An important fact to remember is that puppies need to be with their mother for eight weeks, receiving milk filled with nutrients from her; eventually being weaned off her milk to eat puppy food.

What is acceptable in another person's house or among other dogs may not be acceptable to your home. If you can understand that biting, nipping, jumping, growling, whining, chewing, licking faces and occasional urination are normal, then you can start to deal with these behaviours in training.

A very important factor is that your puppy was once with its mother and probably a few siblings. Arriving in your home, your puppy is now in an unknown place with new smells, perhaps new pets, certainly new people, which can be traumatic and scary. In these first few days, puppies might sleep more, eat more or less and may display perfect behaviour. Once the adjustment period is over, their

normal behaviours will start to present. It is after the first week that you will begin to see your puppy's true personality and normal behaviour.

During this initial period, you will want to balance the love and attention, with proper alone time for your puppy. You do not want your puppy to get used to you being around and receiving attention all the time, because this can lead to separation anxiety and other behavioural issues later on.

Puppies naturally chew and nip. There are different reasons for these behaviours. Nipping others is meant as fun, teasing and to be playful. Chewing on you, clothing, blankets and other items can be because of teething. When teething occurs, you need to supply appropriate items for your puppy to chew on.

Chewing on items when your puppy is not ready for teeth or has all their teeth is often about cleaning their teeth, because it feels good or because they are displaying displeasure. Chewing on shoes or something you dearly love can indicate your puppy is asking for attention.

## 11.4 Feeding Time



**In the wild, animals have a feeding time based on their hunger.**

There is also a social order and communication that determines access to food. Domestic pets are different. For domestic pets there is no need to fear the loss of food - in fact, their routine can become redundant and boring.

Your dog will let you know when it is hungry through various behaviours, including following you into the kitchen. Many dogs tend to overeat when they see a bowl of food. During feeding time, it is suggested that you provide the appropriate portion of food, but do not leave out extra food because this will also be consumed rather than your dog eating it later when they are hungry again.

Begging is common, especially if you do nothing to stop this behaviour. You may actually be unintentionally showing your dog that begging is appropriate.

Begging can be done in several ways. A dog may bark in request for food. It may try to nip food from your hand as you prepare it. Some dogs try to jump, nip or pull on your clothing to beg. Brushing up against you can also be a begging tactic. Your dog will try to do anything it can to make you realise it is there and it wants food.

Even though these are typical behaviours and natural to your dog you can train your dog to sit, wait and receive their food reward at feeding times. If you work outside of the house, you may have a feeding routine. If you work from home, you must still ensure you have set times.

If you provide your dogs with extra treats, they may also try to beg for those. Dogs have a great sense of hearing, so if they hear the treat bag, they could display all the feeding time behaviours listed above.

In some cases, it is possible that your dog will stop eating what you have been feeding them. It depends on what you feed them and if you vary the flavours and combinations. Dogs just like humans can get tired of the same food every day, for each meal. You will notice this change in preference during feeding time when they refuse to eat what you prepare but snap up treats with no problems.

Introducing a different food will help you decide if the behaviour associated with not eating is related to what you are serving. If it is about wanting a change, the new food will be eaten with speed and appreciation.

## 11.5 Habits and Behaviours



**There are several habits and behaviours a dog will display.**

Some of these habits are instinctive. They have been inherited as a form of communication or survival, sometimes both. Habits can also be learned and are difficult to retrain because they have gone on for too long. It is up to you to assess different habits and behaviours to train your dog. However, you also need to recognise there are typical behaviours and habits your dog might have such as licking, digging and jumping. These are the three most common behaviours that can turn into habits you do not want to continue.

### **Licking**

Licking is a sign of affection, curiosity, and friendliness. A dog might lick something in their vicinity such as a telephone pole, hydrant, excrement or another dog's derriere. Licking is about taste as well as information gathering.

If you have residue food smells on your hand your dog might become very curious and start cleaning your hand to get more of the taste.

When you return home after a long absence your dog may lick your hands, face and any other part of you they can reach, as a way to show their happiness at your return. This happy licking may be acceptable to you. However, licking to show happiness to strangers who visit may not be as acceptable to those who visit.

As a habit and a trait for communication, you have to be able to train your dog to be aware of when it is permissible to lick and when it is not.

## **Digging**

Digging is a habit that some dog breeds show more than others. Terriers, for example, tend to dig more than other breeds. Dogs will dig for several reasons: to keep cool, get comfortable, for entertainment, to bury valuable items, to find small prey, for escape or due to separation anxiety.

Dogs might create a bed in the dirt by digging up the ground and making a circle. This behaviour is to help keep your dog at a comfortable temperature. They may be hot, so they are attempting to find a cooler location. Your dog may be too cold, so they are trying to get into the earth and cover themselves a little to protect against the cold.

Sometimes a dog can just be bored, and digging is a distraction. Usually, this type of digging is accompanied by a playful posture, where your dog might dig a little and then run around. However, digging can become a habit that can cause damage to your garden.

Keeping food safe or digging up prey is certainly another reason for digging. If your dog is using this method you may want to train for designated areas.

## **Jumping**

Jumping is a sign of affection, play and happiness. It can also be a means of subduing an intruder and protecting you. A dog might knock you down if they sense danger. A dog might leap at a stranger they feel is about to hurt you. In most cases, jumping is to get your attention and to show their happiness and affection.

## **Panting**

Most of the heat is expelled through their mouth and this is how most dogs regulate their body temperature.

## **Barking**

Dogs bark to express aggression, fear or insecurity. The type of barking and body language can signal their state of mind.

## **Summary**

In this module, you have learned a lot about a dog's typical behaviour. You have also gained a little insight into how to train your dog to avoid habitual behaviours you do not like.

You now understand that certain behaviours are instinctive, learned through the early weeks with their mothers and original owners.

Throughout this module, you have gained insight into why your dog might "act out" by destroying your possessions, as well as how they show their affection, boredom and other emotions.

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