



Potter League
Enriching Lives

MARKING BEHAVIOR IN DOGS

Urine-marking occurs when there is either instability in a dog's relationships or when a dog is feeling anxious. It is not a house soiling problem. To resolve the problem, you need to address the underlying reason for your dog's need to mark.

House Soiling or Urine Marking? How to Tell the Difference!

Your dog may be urine-marking if:

- The problem is primarily urination. Dogs rarely mark with feces.
- The amount of urine is small and is found primarily on vertical surfaces. Dogs do however, sometimes mark on horizontal surfaces. Leg-lifting and spraying are versions of urine-marking, but even if your dog doesn't assume these postures, he may still be urine-marking
- A pet in your home is not spayed or neutered. Intact males and females are more likely to urine-mark than spayed or neutered animals. However, even spayed or neutered animals may mark in response to other intact animals in the home.
- Your dog urinates on new objects in the environment (a shopping bag, a visitor's purse); on objects that have unfamiliar smells, or on objects that have another animal's scent.
- Your dog has conflicts with other animals in your home. When there's instability in the relationship, a dog may feel a need to communicate by urine-marking.
- Your dog has contact with other animals outside your home. If your dog sees another animal through a door or window, he may feel a need to mark.
- Your dog marks frequently on neighborhood walks.



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What You Can Do:

- Spay or neuter your pets as soon as possible. Spaying or neutering your dog may stop urinemarking altogether; however, if he has been urine-marking over a long period of time, a pattern may already be established.
- Resolve conflicts between animals in your home. See our handout “Canine Rivalry” for dog issues within the home. If a new pet has been added to the family, then see our handouts “Introducing Your New Dog to Your Resident Dog” and “Introducing Your New Cat to Other Pets.”
- Restrict your dog’s access to doors and windows through which they can observe animals outside. If this isn’t possible, discourage the presence of other animals near your house.
- Clean soiled areas thoroughly (see our handout: “Successful Cleaning to Remove Pet Odors and Stains”). Don’t use strong smelling cleaners as they may cause your pet to “over-mark” the spot.
- Make previously soiled areas inaccessible or unattractive (see our handout: “Aversives for Dogs”).
- Keep objects likely to cause marking out of reach. Guest’s belongings, new purchases, and so forth should be placed in a closet or cabinet.
- If your dog is marking in response to a new resident in your home (a new baby, roommate, or spouse), have the new resident make friends with your dog by feeding, grooming, and playing with your dog. Also make sure good things happen to your dog when the new baby is around (see our handout: “Preparing Your Pet for Baby’s Arrival”).
- Watch your dog at all times when he is indoors for signs that he is thinking about urine-marking. When he begins to urinate, interrupt him by making a noise of some sort and take him outside, then praise him and give him a treat if he urinates. When you’re unable to watch him, put your dog in confinement (a crate or small room where he has never marked) or tether him to you with a leash.
- Practice “nothing in life is free” with your dog (see our handout: “Nothing In Life Is Free”). Have your dog perform at least one behavior (such as “sit”) before you pet him, feed him, put on his leash, or throw a toy for him. “Nothing in life is free” helps build confidence in your dog and will reduce his need to mark.
- Clicker train and play with your dog every day to reduce anxiety (see our handouts: “Dog Click Training” and “Stress Relief for Your Pet” for stress reducing products).



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What Not to Do:

Don't punish your dog after the fact. Punishment administered, even a minute after the event, is ineffective because your dog won't understand why he is being punished. It can also lead to issues of fear or aggression.

Pets Aren't People

Dogs don't urinate or defecate out of spite or jealousy. If your dog urinates on your baby's diaper bag, it's not because he is jealous, or dislikes your baby. The unfamiliar scents and sounds of a new baby in the house are simply causing him to urine-mark.

Anxiety

Urine-marking is usually associated with instability in relationships. While this is often the case, some dogs may mark when they feel anxious due to changes in their living situations. For example, a new baby in the home brings new sounds, smells, and people, as well as changes in routine. Your dog probably isn't getting as much attention as he was used to getting. All of these changes cause him to feel anxious, which may cause him to mark. Likewise, a dog that is generally anxious may become more so by the presence of roaming neighborhood animals in your yard, or by the introduction of a new cat or dog into your household. If your dog is feeling anxious, you might consider talking to your veterinarian about medication to reduce his anxiety while you work on behavior modification.