

Territorial Marking Behavior in Dogs

Dogs enjoy feeling safe in a particular space or area. They sometimes let other people and animals know this by marking. A dog may bark to drive away what he perceives as intruders to his territory, but if the dog is in an unfamiliar setting, some will mark on the resident dog's bed or on the front of a couch so he can feel safe and stake his claim. Female dogs will do this too, but male dogs get blamed more often for being the culprit.

Urine marking is *not* a house-soiling problem. To resolve the issue, you need to address the underlying reason for your pet'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 and cats do mark with feces but it is not as common.
- Your dog isn't spayed or neutered. Both intact males and females are more likely to urine mark than are spayed or neutered animals.
- Your pet is not comfortable with other animals in or outside your home. When there's anxiety around territory, some dogs may feel a need to ward others away by urine-marking their territory. Even if your pet just sees another animal through a door or window, he may feel a need to mark his territory.
- Your dog urinates frequently on neighborhood walks.

What You Can Do:

- **Spay or neuter your dog** as soon as possible. Spaying or neutering will more than likely reduce or stop urine marking altogether. If your dog has developed a habit of urine marking over a long period of time, a pattern is probably already established. Changing this long-standing behavior will take time and patience.
- **Resolve conflicts between animals in your home** (call our Behavior Helpline for questions regarding this).
- **Clean soiled areas thoroughly.** Use enzyme-based pet urine removal products.
- **Make previously soiled areas inaccessible or unattractive.** If making soiled areas inaccessible or unattractive isn't possible, try to change the significance of those areas. Feed, treat and play with your dog in the areas he is inclined to mark.
- **Keep objects likely to cause marking out of reach.** Guests' 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** by feeding, grooming and playing with your dog. Make sure good things happen to your dog when the new baby is around.
- **Watch your dog at all times when he is indoors for signs that he is thinking about urinating.** When he begins to urinate, interrupt him and take him outside, then praise him and give him a treat if he urinates outside. 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.** This is a safe, non-confrontational way to establish your leadership and requires your dog to work for everything he wants from you. Ask your dog to do

something such as “sit” before you pet him, give him dinner, put on his leash, or throw a toy for him. This is his way of saying, “Please.” Establishing yourself as a calm leader can help your dog feel more comfortable and less insecure - diminishing his need to mark his territory.

Belly Bands can save your sanity while you’re working to change your dog’s marking behavior. We do recommend slipping a sanitary pad inside the belly band to absorb the urine otherwise you’ll be washing it quite often.

What Not To Do:

Don’t punish your dog. Punishment is ineffective because your dog won't fully understand what it is you’re attempting to do. Many become afraid or more anxious with any punishment and the marking behavior actually gets worse. Territorial marking is very normal behavior for animals so please call us for help with the problem.

Need help? Call our free pet behavior help line at (503) 416-2983.