

Piddles, Puddles! Submissive Urination

WHAT IS SUBMISSIVE WETTING?

Just like people, dogs have different personalities and traits. Some dogs are bold and confident while others are shy, tentative, and unsure. Sometimes these types of dogs urinate when approached by people or other dogs, picked up, pushed or scolded, stared at, or when someone bends over it and pets it. The submissive wetting dog is **not deliberately** misbehaving but he is responding in this way due to excitement, apprehension, or even fear. The dog is reacting on an emotional level to something in the immediate situation that produces extreme feelings of submission. It is a confidence problem. Submissive wetting can also occur if the dog becomes very excited (when greeting his owners after a period of separation, or when welcoming guests into the household).

HOW DO I KNOW THAT IT IS NOT JUST A HOUSE TRAINING PROBLEM?

The key here is that submissive urination occurs when you or someone else or another dog is interacting with your dog (such as petting, scolding, picking up, etc.) If it is a house training problem the dog would be urinating whether you are interacting with him or not. Submissive urination is usually small amounts, little squirts, or tiny puddles. House-training issues usually large amounts that may be done when you are not watching the dog. The exception to this may be an un-neutered male dog who is marking territory (lifting his leg in the house, depositing small amounts of urine to say this is mine), which may be done while the dog is out of sight and not interacting with you.

WHAT CAUSES THIS PROBLEM?

Some breeds are genetically predisposed towards submissive urination, such as Cocker Spaniels. Other develop it if they were not socialized well as young puppies. If not socialized well enough, dogs become fearful and unsure. Some dogs develop it because they were severely or inappropriately punished. Some develop it when the owner unintentionally reinforces it (e.g. owner stops doing something to the dog or comforts/reassures it in response to urination). Puppies often will urinate when excited, but they can grow out of it with proper positive handling and training.

HOW CAN I HELP MY DOG WITH THIS PROBLEM?

There are several things you can do to help your pet overcome this problem.

1. TAKE YOUR DOG TO YOUR VETERINARY DOCTOR FOR A FULL MEDICAL CHECK UP. Some types of infections can cause a dog to lose his bladder easily, and deposit small amounts of urine about the house. It is always very wise to have your veterinary doctor do a full medical check up to make sure something physically isn't causing the problem.



2. DO NOT BECOME ANGRY OR PUNISH YOUR DOG FOR WETTING. This will only erode your dog's confidence and increase the frequency of wetting. Submissive wetting is not a punishable offense. Remember that it is an **involuntary** response to a situation, person or another dog. He is not doing it to "get even" with you or to annoy you. Be calm and do not yell. Simply ignore your dog for two or three minutes if he piddles; stop all petting, eye contact and verbal contact.
3. IDENTIFY ALL SITUATIONS DURING WHICH YOUR DOG WETS IN. Is it when you first come home or when a guest comes into the household? Is it when you scold him for something, call him, or when you pick him up? Write down all situations in which he has submissively wetted so you know what you will have to work on.
4. SET UP SITUATIONS SO THAT YOUR DOG HAS SUCCESS IN NOT WETTING. For instance, if when you first come home at night and your dog is so excited that he piddles on the floor, try ignoring your pet the first 20 minutes when you come home until he is calmer. When you go to greet him, keep it cool and low key. Try squatting down and petting under his chin (rather than the top of head) as you avoid eye contact with him. Have your guests do the same thing when they greet your dog, but only after they have been in your house for 20 minutes.

If your dog wets when you approach him, do not approach him. Instead crouch down and turn your side to the dog. Let your dog approach you. If the dog appears calm, pet him lightly under the chin. If petting produces wetting, then stop, but try it again in a few days.

Avoid talking to your dog in the situations that produce urination. As your dog's confidence builds, you can begin to add words spoken in a gentle and soft tone. After a few days of this routine, ask the dog to sit using a food treat and then softly praise him for doing so. If this stimulates wetting, withhold it for a few days and then try again.

Run through situational training at least several

times a day. For instance, if your homecoming produces submissive urination, follow the above directions, then go out and come in immediately again. Then do it again and again. This desensitization should help eliminate the behavior over a period of time. As your dog gains confidence, see if you can approach him in a standing position instead of a crouch. Let the dog's reactions tell you how to behave. If you see the telltale squat start in the back, than back off a step and start over until you can proceed.

Involve others in the program. Have family members or friends go through the same routine as described above. When several others have gone through it with your dog, it will greatly benefit the permanence of the correction. If backsliding occurs, just start over again at the beginning. Above all, be patient and understanding. Your dog can sense your mood and will react to it accordingly.

Another option is to teach your dog to come to you willingly with a food treat. When allowed to approach happily on their own, most dogs switch from fear to happiness thus avoiding the wetting. Your dog should never be punished for coming to you when called. This will only teach him to avoid doing the command, or he may start submissively wetting when completing the command as he thinks he may be punished for doing so.

While you are working on this problem, it makes sense to keep or greet your dog in the kitchen so you can clean up easily if he piddle. Don't baby your dog should he wet. This will only reinforce it.

5. ABSOLUTELY NO PHYSICAL PUNISHMENT FOR ANY TYPE OF PROBLEM THE DOG MAY BE HAVING. Correction for this type of dog should be kept very low key (such as a single firm verbal "NO"). Do not punish or scold. Set the dog up for success, not failure.
6. GET YOUR DOG INTO A POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT TRAINING PROGRAM. This type of dog needs confidence building and a good training program will teach you to communicate effectively with your dog. He will then understand what is expected of him. A

submissive dog needs a training program that uses a lot of food, toys, and praise to teach him. Stay away from any program that encourages you to strike, swat, push at or shake, throw things at or jerk him on the leash. These are all outdated, ineffective training methods that will erode his confidence further.

7. BE CONSISTENT. Be consistent in your expectations for the dog. Always treat him fairly. Develop household rules that the whole family understands and enforces. This will help with the dog's confidence as he will understand what is expected of him, since it stays the same day by day.
8. PUT HIM ON A SCHEDULE. Submissive dogs are greatly comforted if decisions are made for them. Put him on a regular schedule of feeding, walking, exercising, playing and sleeping. Stick to your schedule.
9. CRATE TRAIN YOUR DOG. Crate training gives a dog his own special room in which he feels comfortable and safe. Crate training helps prevent many of the things that cause us to become angry. When crated, the dog can't chew or mess up the house, sleep on the furniture, etc. Please refer to our crate training handout for detailed information on crate training.

If you have any problems, questions or concerns please call Humane Society Silicon Valley's FREE Animal Behavior Helpline at (408)727-3383, extension 753. If you need referrals to positive dog training companies in the South Bay area, please call extension 759.