

Dog: Excitement and Fear Urination during Greeting



Some dogs, often puppies or young adults, are unable to control their bladders during greetings; this can involve greeting humans and/or other dogs. Often times this behavior goes hand in hand with either excited type greeting behaviors or mildly fear related or conflicted greeting behaviors. In most cases these problems resolve quickly with age when addressed appropriately.

The term “submissive urination” has been used to describe fear or conflict leading to loss of bladder control due to a sympathetic stress response. There can be many reasons for a dog to display fear behavior during greeting such as a person approaching, reaching, or excitedly greeting, but also previous punishment, scolding, or a deep or loud voice can cause dogs to become fearful.

In contrast, dogs that display excitement urination are very active or overly excited and subsequently void their bladders involuntarily; they are highly animated during greeting. With excitement urination the fear related signals are absent and urination can occur while standing or walking during greetings and even playtime.

The body language for fear/conflict urination might include one or more of the following signs that are displayed because the person (or dog) being greeted is perceived as threatening and the dog will show appeasing or fear-related behaviors:

- Approaching with crouched body
- Flattening of the ears
- Avoiding eye contact
- Lowering of head and neck
- Turning head sideways
- High pitched vocalization
- Sitting, cowering, tucking the tail
- Rolling onto side or back and exposing the belly

Other behavioral reasons should always be ruled out and medical conditions, such as urinary tract infections or bladder dysfunction should be considered. Therefore, take your dog to the veterinarian if the problems persist.

Ways to Help Your Dog

- Avoid overly excited greetings. Approach and interact with the dog calmly and softly.
- Always greet in a calm, predictable manner and reward calm behaviors during greeting.
- Keep the greetings short and calm and redirect to a treat or toy before your dog gets excited or fearful.
- Turn your body sideways and don't stare directly at the dog.
- Don't lean over your dog, but lower yourself down to the ground and the dog's level when petting or giving attention, so he doesn't feel threatened by someone "hovering" over him.
- Use treats or a toy rather than petting.
- Greet the dog outside.
- Don't reach directly over the dog, but allow the dog to approach you, and then pet the dog gently for short periods of time.

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- If the problem occurs upon your returning to the home, ignore your dog at first for a few minutes to let him calm down before giving any attention.
- Ask your guests to ignore your dog for the first few minutes; then use predictable interactions for greeting.
- Incorporate clicker training to help with calm greeting.
- Build your dog's confidence by teaching obedience commands using positive reinforcement methods with treats and praise.

Overly excited greeting or petting the dog usually exacerbates the problem; therefore, decreasing direct physical interactions during greeting will help the dog to calm down. **Never punish or scold your dog when he urinates**—this will only increase the fear and worsen the problem. Rarely are medications needed as an adjunct with behavior modification for excitement or fear urination.