

Are You Making Your Dog Sad? If You're Doing This, You May Be

Dogs don't speak our language, so it's easy for them to become confused or even sad at our actions. Make sure you're not doing these 10 things that can break your dog's spirit and cause confusion or sadness.

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Since dogs don't speak our language, it's sometimes difficult to know if we're doing things that confuse them, make them sad or that aren't in their best interests
- One example is punishing them for potty mistakes — it's up to us to ensure our pets succeed at housetraining; another is not understanding how important playtime is for dogs
- Failing to recognize your dog as an athlete is another very common pet parent mistake; canines are designed by nature to be much more physically active than most get the chance to be
- Overlooking the need for ongoing socialization and obedience training throughout a dog's life is another way in which pet parents inadvertently create problems for their pet
- The next time you engage in a play session with your dog, try staying present with just that one activity. Focus exclusively on your pet and your interaction with her

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10 Ways You May Be Unintentionally Breaking Your Dog's Spirit

1. **Punishing your dog for potty mistakes**



This is housetraining ground rule No. 4: When mistakes happen, there can be no shouting, absolutely no physical contact and never rub your dog's nose in his mess. For many people, this can be the most difficult rule to follow, but this is very important.

In order to successfully housetrain your pup, you have to avoid punishing any type of mistake. And mistakes are going to happen. Your job is to avoid giving him a chance to fail, but when he does, recognize that your response sets the stage for everything that happens after.

It's important that every situation pertaining to housetraining is very positive. In short, you can't punish or frighten a dog into appropriate behavior. By the time your dog is relieving himself on your floor, your opportunity for a successful potty break outside has passed. Ensuring you're doing your part in helping your dog succeed is the most important aspect of housetraining.

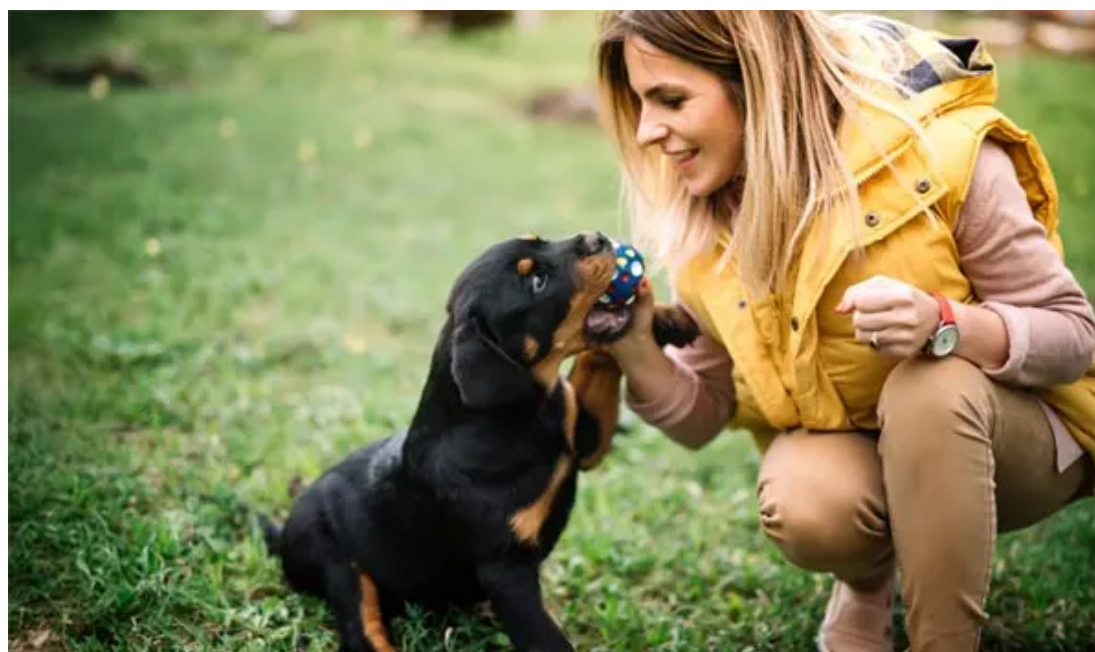
2. **Thinking of dog crates as "jail cells"**



For some reason, many dog guardians think crates are an invention of the devil. If you're one of them, here's what you're missing: your dog is by nature a den dweller, and a crate affords you the opportunity to work with her natural desire to seek out small, dark, safe spots to rest.

This can be a huge win for you, as well as her, if you need to housetrain her, not to mention for car or plane travel, or overnight stays with friends, family or at a pet-friendly hotel. If you suffer from crate hate, talk to some dog-loving friends who've crate-trained their pets. Chances are they'll tell you their dog seeks out her crate on her own for naps, at bedtime and whenever she just wants a little me time.

3. **Ignoring the importance of playtime**



If you're like many busy pet parents today, you're multitasking when you're interacting with your dog. For example, you play tug-of-war with one hand while talking on the phone or checking Facebook with the other.

Or you take your dog for a walk but pull her along because you're in a hurry, or you're distracted by a cellphone call, or the weather isn't ideal. She doesn't get much chance to **stop and sniff**, which is as important and interesting to your dog as your phone call is to you.

The next time you engage in a play session with your dog, try staying present with just that one activity. Focus exclusively on your pet and your interaction with her. Even if you're not really feeling it at that moment, get animated. If you throw a toy and she brings it back to you, praise her enthusiastically each time she returns it. If you take her for a walk, view the activity from the perspective of your pet. Focus on making it enjoyable for her. Give her a chance to sniff and dawdle a bit.

4. **Failing to obedience-train your dog**



Behavior problems are the No. 1 reason dogs are relinquished to animal shelters, the No. 1 reason they don't find new forever homes, and as a result, the No. 1 reason they are euthanized.

A puppy should begin formal obedience training at 8 weeks, and if you adopt an adult dog who has received no obedience training, you should enroll her in a class right away. It's also good idea to take your dog through a refresher obedience course every few years, or when you need help with the inevitable behavioral hiccup that crops up as she ages.

If you want a balanced, well-mannered dog, the way to achieve this is with positive reinforcement behavior training, not punishment-based training, which is less effective and inhumane. Positive reinforcement

training is based on the theory that rewarding your dog for desired behavior will encourage more of that behavior.

5. **Skipping wellness checkups**

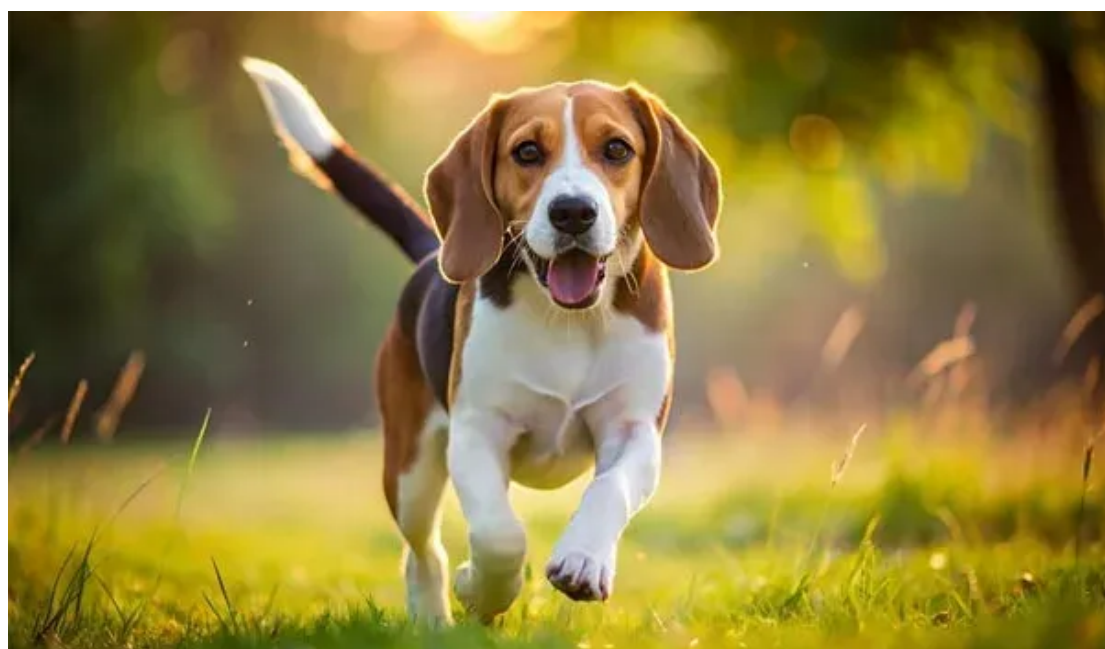


If you wait until your pet is already sick to seek veterinary care, in most cases you have waited too long; you're being reactive.

The truth is that if you aren't intentionally creating health through wise lifestyle choices, then you are passively allowing health to slip away. Maintaining health is an active process; we must work at it or it won't sustain itself.

A thorough wellness checkup will address your pet's breed/genetic predispositions, activity level and exercise regimen, environmental stress and mental well-being, chemical load, diet and other factors to formulate wellness plans for each stage of your pet's life.

6. **Failing to recognize your dog's natural athleticism**



In order to stay lean, fit, well-conditioned, emotionally balanced and fully mobile as she ages, your dog needs a good workout every day. Canines are designed by nature for movement.

If your dog doesn't get opportunities to run, play and get regular aerobic exercise, even if she's not overweight, she can end up with arthritis and other debilitating conditions that affect the bones, joints, muscles and internal organs. In addition, many canine behavior problems are the result a lack of physical and mental activity.

What many people don't realize is that like their owners, dogs need encouragement to get physically active. Even the biggest, greenest backyard isn't by itself enough to motivate your pet to get the exercise she requires to stay in good physical condition. The only way to make sure your dog gets enough exercise is to provide her with the companionship and incentive she needs to stay active. Your dog should be getting a minimum of 20 minutes of sustained heart-thumping exercise three times a week.

7. **Dropping the ball when it comes to socializing your dog**



Socialization means exposing your dog (preferably as a puppy) to as many new people, animals, environments and other safe, positive stimuli as possible without overwhelming him. Socialization should engage all of your dog's senses through exposure to the sights, sounds and smells of daily life.

This exposure will help him develop a comfort level with new and different situations, with the result that he'll learn to handle new experiences and challenges with acceptable, appropriate behavior. Dogs that have not been adequately socialized often develop entrenched fear responses and generalized anxiety, resulting in behavior problems that can make them unsuitable as family pets.

8. **Ignoring those teeth and nails**



Two hygiene items every pet parent should but often doesn't attend to are their dog's teeth and nails. You should brush your dog's teeth if not every day, at least several times a week. Otherwise, like most dogs over the age of 3, he'll have gum disease, and as time passes the situation will worsen until his mouth smells bad and feels worse. Then you'll be faced with a big vet bill and he'll probably lose a few teeth.

Your dog's nails also need to be clipped regularly, and here's how to do it. How often depends on how fast they grow and how much time he spends on surfaces that grind them down naturally. If you can't bear to clip your

dog's nails yourself, make a standing appointment with a groomer or veterinarian who will do it for you. You'd be amazed at how often dogs develop serious paw problems from nails that have grown too long.

9. **Choosing/using the wrong type of collar, harness or leash**



Many pet guardians don't realize the importance of choosing the right type of collar, harness and leash for their dog.

Certain dogs, for example, should wear a harness and should never be leashed or even handled by the collar. These include dogs that pull or lunge while on a leash, dogs prone to tracheal collapse, dogs that have a seizure disorder, and pets with chiropractic issues involving the neck and/or back.

Choke collars should never be used. These collars can cause pain and injury to your dog's neck, and in extreme cases, strangulation. For walks, training sessions and whenever your dog will be on leash, use either a head collar or no-pull harness, not retractable leashes. Flat leashes no longer than 6 feet are recommended. If your dog needs more aggressive restraining devices, it's a sign there's still more training work to be done.

10. **Not teaching your dog to accept handling**



Snuggle sessions are a great opportunity to get your new pup or adult dog comfortable with having all the areas of his body handled, because soon enough he'll need to visit the veterinarian or perhaps the groomer. He'll need to have his teeth brushed every day and his nails trimmed on a regular basis.

The best way to prepare your pup to be handled throughout his life is to begin getting him used to having sensitive areas of his body handled as soon as you bring him home. This will not only acclimate your dog to

human handling, but will also help you familiarize yourself with how his body feels so you can quickly identify any abnormalities that may occur, like a lump or bump on or under his skin.

Sources and References

[Bark Post \(Archived\)](#)
