

Homeward Bound Golden Retriever Rescue

Golden Rule Training

Submissive Urination in Dogs

Why do some dogs roll over and urinate?

Although not too common, submissive urination is normal part of canine communication. In the wild, submissive urination among dogs is perceived as a form of respect towards higher ranking pack leaders. In our domestic setting, however, owners may not really be thrilled with this behavior. Fortunately, in most cases this form of urination eventually subsides.

If a dog urinates when greeted or when being scolded by its owner very likely is simply saying: "Please do not hurt me, I am submissive toward you, okay?" This form of submission is observed particularly in puppies both in the wild toward canine pack leaders and in domestic settings towards humans.

In most cases, submissive urination is seen with puppies; however, in some cases it is seen in adult dogs that are particularly submissive or dogs that have been neglected or abused. In all cases, it mainly stems from a lack of confidence.

Whether you have a puppy or an adult dog with this behavior, kindness and patience are the keys to helping your dog overcome submissive urination.

What are the signs and body language?

When a dog submissively urinates, he's trying to convey that he's not a threat. Some dogs will urinate when they're exceptionally excited or feeling submissive or intimidated in specific situations.

Dogs that submissively urinate usually do so when greeting people or animals (especially unfamiliar ones), during exciting events, while playing, during physical contact, such as petting, or when scolded or punished. It's as though they lose bladder control. Some dogs produce dribbles of urine, while others void large puddles.

When in a situation that seems to trigger submissive urination, a dog will tend to display submissive postures such as: cowering, lowering the body, raising the front paws, tucking the tail, flattening the ears back and licking the lips.

In addition, the dog may also display a submissive grin. It is important to note, a submissive grin often looks like aggression because it involves a dog showing his teeth, but it is not a threat. The submissive grin, which is almost always accompanied by other signs of submission like those listed above, functions as an appeasement gesture. Many dogs display submissive grins while wiggling, narrowing their eyes and licking their lips. Like submissive urination, this behavior often occurs during greetings and sometimes during stressful social interactions with people.

Submissive urination is most common in puppies, but some adult dogs submissively urinate as well, especially those who seem to lack confidence. The behavior is more common in some breeds than others, such as retrievers. Some dogs submissively urinate only when interacting with their pet parents, some only with visitors, some only with other dogs, and some with everyone.

Main Situations that precipitate submissive urination include:

- Over affectionate greetings
- Guests entering your home
- Arguments between people
- Scolding
- Loud noises

Strategies to help your puppy or adult dog

As with all negative behaviors, consult your veterinarian first to rule out any medical issues. Dogs will try to tell you something is wrong and we see it as a behavior change. For example, he may have a urinary tract infection and that is the reason he is suddenly urinating in the house. In addition, a change in his diet can cause gastric upset, and incontinence problems (even leaking while sleeping) may occur. Some abnormalities of the genitalia can also cause incontinence. There are diseases and medications that cause frequent urination. These and all other medical causes should be ruled out before evaluating or treating a dog for submissive urination problems. Once you are sure it is a behavior issue, then proceed to strategies and solutions.

In puppies, this form of submission tends to dissipate as the dog grows and develops more confidence. The more the puppy is socialized, the more confidence it gains. In adult dogs, it may take some time and patience, but eventually as the dog learns that humans can be trusted, the behavior should diminish. It may be helpful to enroll your dog in positive reinforcement obedience training, as this will help increase the dog's confidence as he learns new skills and you show your approval through praise and treats!

If the dog urinates upon greeting, it helps to simply ignore the puppy for the first few minutes upon returning home. This helps to lessen the excitement and the chance of urination. Another good method is to toss a few treats so the dog focuses on eating. After the dog appears calm, have the dog sit and pet it by crouching down while avoiding direct eye contact. He will learn he gets attention when he is calm.

NEVER punished your puppy or dog for inappropriate urination! This will make the problem worse. At the same time, do not comfort the dog with a soothing voice (the dog should not be reassured or they will think the behavior is being praised). It is best to ignore the behavior, work on the dog's confidence and in time, submissive urination eventually subsides. Stay calm and be patient!

When training, always vocalize your pleasure with a happy voice when your dog does something good. It can be as simple as "good boy!" Give treats liberally and only ask him

to perform cues you know he can do successfully. For example, say "Sit" in a calm and firm manner. When you see him start to sit, then praise him and give him a treat. It may seem silly, but every time you give the dog a chance to succeed and he does, make a big deal about it and you will strengthen his confidence. Dogs want to please their owners, so this step is important, especially for a shy or submissive dog.

In addition to obedience training, you may consider Agility training. If your dog is fit and has no joint issues, you can train a submissive dog in agility, and this will increase his confidence as well. As with all positive training methods, it is a chance to get some good bonding time as you go through the exercise together. In fact, any fun activity you can find to do (chase the stick, hide the treat) will help him gain confidence.

Other Behavior Problems to Rule Out

1. Untrained Young Puppy

If a puppy is less than 12 weeks of age, he may not be house trained. The lack of house training might be because he simply has not learned where to eliminate and where not to eliminate. Alternatively, the problem might be entirely physical. Many puppies under the age of 12 weeks haven't developed bladder and bowel control, and they can't "hold it" for more than a very brief time. Puppies typically need to go out every 2 hours until their bladders grow to a larger size. For more information about house training your young puppy, please see our article, *House Training for Puppies in the Homeward Bound Golden Rule Training Library*.

2. Incomplete House Training

Some dogs have not been completely house trained. If a dog is not sure where to go and has not learned to hold his bladder, he may eliminate in the house. He may occasionally soil in the house, soil if he's not given frequent opportunities to eliminate outside, or soil only when left alone in the home for long periods of time. He may also soil if there's a change in his family's daily routine that alters his access to the outdoors. Some dogs sneak out of their pet parents' sight to soil in other rooms. A moderately house trained dog simply doesn't know how to indicate to his pet parents that he needs to go outside. For more information about how to resolve incomplete house training, please see our article, *House Training Your Adult Dog*.

3. Urine Marking

Some dogs urinate in the house to mark their scent. Dogs mark for a variety of reasons, including claiming territory, to identify themselves to other dogs and let them know they have been there. In addition, they may mark in response to frustration, stress or anxiety.

Typically, a dog marks his scent by urinating small amounts on vertical surfaces. Most male dogs and some female dogs that mark raise a leg to urinate.

Do's and Don'ts when working with a submissive dog:

Do:

- If your dog urinates because he is excited to see you:
 - Greet your dog outside.
 - Toss a handful of small treats or a few favorite toys in the direction of your dog as he runs up to greet you. This is redirecting his focus so he does not get overly excited.
 - Ignore your dog when you first come home and walk through the door. Wait until he has completely calmed down before interacting with him. When you finally greet your dog, do so calmly. Look off to the side instead of straight at him. Sit on the floor or squat down—and avoid looming over your dog as you bend toward him.
 - Teach your dog to perform a behavior, such as “sit”, and when he greets people, again redirecting his focus.
 - First, practice the sit behavior outside of the greeting context, in a calm place, without other people around. To learn more about teaching your dog to “sit”, please see our article, Teaching Your Dog to Sit.
- When petting your dog, touch him under the chin or chest, rather than on top of his head or ears. Petting under the chin is not as intimidating as putting your hand over the head.
- Keep play sessions with your dog low-key and play games with him that focus on toys rather than bodily contact.
- Be patient! Seeing your dog blossom is worth all the work.

Do NOT:

- Do not look at your dog in the eye or bend over him or speak to him if he starts to submissively urinate or if you think he might (this is a dominate position to your dog).
- Do not hug your dog or pat him on the top of the head when greeting or interacting with him. This can also be interpreted as dominant. Most dogs do not like to be patted on the head or hugged, they learn to tolerate it!
- Do not scowl, frown or stare down your dog, especially in response to submissive urination. You should even avoid making frustrated comments, as doing so might make the behavior worse.

- DO NOT VERBALLY SCOLD YOUR DOG OR PUNISH YOUR DOG IN ANY WAY. Scolding and punishment are likely to make the problem worse. He may urinate more in an attempt to make you less angry.

There are two objectives in treating submissive urination; increase your dog's confidence and avoid the situations that cause the behavior. Watch to see what the dog's threshold is pertinent to his situation that causes him to feel threatened. Once the confidence grows the threshold will change and you will see progress. Expose your dog to his triggers slowly and praise only when there is progress, even a small step should be recognized. Do not punish or show disappointment when he urinates, just ignore it and clean it up. Remember to move only as fast as your dog can tolerate and do not force him to accept new surroundings or situations sooner than he is able.

Sources:

WebMD, Healthy Dogs

Read more: [How to Train a Submissive Dog \(with submissive urination\) | eHow.com](#)