

Dog is marking... Ask a trainer

By Nan Arthur, CDDBC, CPDT, KPA CTP

Dear Trainer,

I have three dogs and two cats, and just adopted a new lab puppy two weeks ago. All of my pets are spayed and neutered and healthy. Ever since we brought the new puppy home, our oldest dog, which is a five-year-old min-pin mix, has started lifting his leg and peeing all over the house. He doesn't even lift his leg outside, so this is a new behavior, and he has been perfectly housetrained from a very young age. I'm looking for some answers to stop him from doing this and to understand why he is doing it.

Signed,

Soaking Mad

Dear Soaking,

I'm glad to hear your dogs are all healthy and receive regular vet visits to rule out a medical problem with this new behavior. I'm also glad to hear you have all of your pets spayed and neutered as sometimes having unaltered animals can be the root cause of urine marking.

Since you have identified that the urine marking began with the new puppy coming into your home, I'll take an educated guess that your older dog is feeling somewhat "put out" and out of place by the new addition and is "marking his territory" to send a very strong scent message to not only the new puppy, but the rest of your animal household as well.

Dogs use scent marking for a number of reasons, but the main one is to establish territory and message to other dogs that they are "in the area." "Pee mail" if you will.

If your puppy is in the process of housetraining and still has accidents in the house, this can make your older dog more likely to "mark over" in the general area where the puppy has had accidents. Leg lifting increases with dogs when the scent of a new dog is present, so if your puppy is having accidents, you will want to address your puppy housetraining rapidly to avoid your older dog's over-marking the puppy's scent.

Urine marking is also a physiological event as well. Pent up energy, mental stressors, household ranking and diet can all be underlying reasons for urine marking. The following should give you some ideas about all the different areas that can be modified to help your dog relax and stop using the house as his personal bathroom.

Things to consider

Overall stress reduction is one of the first things you can do to dissuade your dog from marking, so an easy fix is to give your older dog more attention. If your dog is marking due to a question about where he now fits into your household of pets, showing him that he is not losing anything in this new arrangement can be a big relief for dogs that are feeling insecure.

It's also important to get the urine smell completely out of the area, as dogs will continue to mark where they have marked in the past if they can detect the urine odor. Use a good enzyme cleaner for this, (I really like the product called Odor Mute) and you may even want to have a professional come out to deep clean if the urine has gotten into the carpet or soaked into furniture.

Preventing your dog from lifting his leg is another important component, and it will require supervision and maybe even a restriction of space until he is convinced that he doesn't need to mark any longer. Baby gates, exercise pens and leashes can all help in this area. Some people use "belly bands" for their dogs to prevent the actual marking. The dog is still able to leg-lift, but the urine is trapped in a doggie diaper. Here is one company that offers them: <http://www.healthypetpantry.net/>

Calming your dog from the inside can also help with marking issues. Be sure your dog is eating a diet that is not adding to his anxiety via the ingredients. Look for low or no carbohydrate foods to help reduce extra energy, and no corn, wheat or soy products. The same goes for your dog's treats as well. Contacting the staff at Paw Country (http://www.welcometopawcountry.com/Home_Page.php) or the Healthy Pet Pantry (<http://www.healthypetpantry.net/>) can help you with food decisions, as well as suggest some herbal remedies that might also help with calmness.

Exercise is another important component to help lower anxiety in dogs, so be sure you are spending at least 15-20 minutes twice a day going for walks, or playing. There are also lots of fun dog toys that will inspire your dog to move more and then help him to rest more than worrying about the new puppy. Check out, <http://www.dogtoys.com/> for lots of toys that are separated by category and size of dog.

Taking your dog through a positive reinforcement training class to help boost confidence and provide him with extra mental stimulation is yet another way to augment your dog's world.

Finally, chewing and food carrier toys are all great ways to focus your dog's energy toward something other than the puppy. If you give your dog valuable things like rawhides, raw bones, bully sticks or stuffed Kongs, your dog will expend energy there rather than worrying about his place in the home. Be sure to give your dogs their own places to chew so they are not challenging each other for these high-value items.

If you are unable to resolve the problem after putting these ideas into play, be sure to contact a behavior consultant to further explore avenues to help your pets meld together. You may also need to consider medications during the re-adjustment period, if you don't find a simple solution to this issue which you can discuss with your veterinarian.

Good luck.

Nan Arthur, CDBC, CPDT, KPA CTP
www.wholedogtraining.com

If you have a dog or cat question, please email me at: dogmomca@wholedogtraining.com