

# Why Is My Dog Behaving Like This?

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## BELLA'S STORY

A friend recently adopted a two-year-old dog named Bella, part Beagle, part Basset Hound. Having moved several times in her short life, she was holding a lot of pent-up energy in an already excitable personality. Human response to her behavior, when she was overstimulated and stressed, reinforced in her that humans would not be there for her. They would not be the leaders she sought. When push came to shove, they abandoned her to confusion—one of her homes lasted a mere week.



Bella's behavior was her way of coping with abandonment in a world that gave her no choice. People expected her to be something she wasn't and couldn't yet be. Each situation supported and encouraged her existing feelings. With every incident, she was labeled "difficult" to deal with, strengthening the probability of a repeat of her responses to the stress held in her physical, mental and emotional bodies.

It appears Bella lived an isolated life. Yet she was still expected by humans to know and behave in a way they thought appropriate. Bella was brand-new to the world she found herself living in. Assumptions had been made that she knew more than she did.

Bella is now being given the opportunity to learn about her world. Her human is using training, love, compassion, consistency, understanding, and boundaries in working with her. What is avoided is having unrealistic expectations of what she is capable of at any given time during her training.

## Actions Speak Louder than Words

It is vital that your actions are consistent with your words in all interactions with your dog. When you take a dog into your life, your behavior is constantly reinforcing something to them. Be conscious of what that is. If they cannot count on you to be consistent in your behavior, they will become creative in theirs.

Being conscious of what you are expressing with your actions and feelings will help your dog understand what you are asking of them. Your dog is incredibly intelligent and wants to fit into your home. It cannot understand mixed messages of what you may expect from it.

An example of contributing to a behavior is when you unintentionally reinforce separation anxiety by how you feel and act about the

dog being home alone. Telling your dog it will be okay with your words, while being filled with worry, guilt and trepidation, is sending a mixed message to your dog that it is not able to understand. Your dog picks up on both: what you are feeling, and what you are saying. When your actions and feelings are in sync, it is an integral part of changing unwanted behavior.

You can unintentionally prevent your dog from feeling safe in their new environment when you

constantly trying to reassure them they are safe now. This particularly applies to dogs who have suffered some form of abuse. They can't let go of their past, if you don't.

You play a big part in your dogs life. You won't always get it right. Be okay with that, but keep trying. Understanding from their perspective while being clear in what is normal in your "pack" will go a long way in creating the behavior you want to encourage. If your dog will be asked to stay alone, you can help it with proper training, release of emotions, and behavior modifications—on both your parts.

Contacting a qualified dog trainer is always a good idea and in cases of aggression, it is imperative. There are many reasons for exhibiting this type of behavior. Seek professional help to identify the reason and to deal effectively with it. It takes time and due diligence on your part to change behavior that they feel justified in exhibiting.

With all dog-related issues, be clear and consistent in what you express both orally and energetically. Do not have unrealistic expectations of them. Qualified trainers, animal communicators, and Emotion and Body Code practitioners can help you and your dog lead happy lives together.

Dogs thrive on predictability from you. Actions that remain the same in nature, are effective over time in changing patterned responses and in helping them to feel safe. Training and clear boundaries, consistently held, will help your dog fulfill their potential.

Humans differ from animals by relying heavily on speech, expressed through the vibration of the vocal cord, to convey messages. Your dog

## REINFORCING LESS-THAN-DESIRABLE BEHAVIOR IN YOUR DOG OCCURS WHEN YOU...

- ◆ Don't take into account the dog's individual personality
- ◆ Have unrealistic expectations and/or label them
- ◆ Don't consider the needs of their breed (and in Bella's case, two breeds)
- ◆ Are not consistent and clear in your behavior
- ◆ See them through their past, not their present
- ◆ Don't take time to seek help to understand what their behavior is saying
- ◆ Don't take the time to understand the message(s) they are sending

has evolved to understand a large vocabulary of the spoken word. It differs innately in that it reads the energy conveyed by you to gather information in order to make sense out of its world.

Mixed messages by humans in Bella's life led to her being labeled "difficult." She was the one expected to change her behavior, not the humans, who didn't understand what she was saying. When a dog is consistently not heard they are not given an opportunity to change.

Dogs communicate energetically with their behavior and body language. They constantly read yours to understand their world. A

great deal of misunderstanding can be avoided if you take the time to listen, interpret what they are conveying by their cues, and be willing to take responsibility for your part in the conversation. It isn't always easy to see how we contribute to unwanted behaviors but it is always worth finding out. When you change your behavior, they can and will change theirs.

It bears repeating that it takes time, commitment, action, compassion and understanding to change both your behavior and theirs. ■

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