

# Sit Happens

Tips & Techniques for Training Your Urban Animal

Trudi Thorpe – dogLOGIC

Trudi Thorpe runs a dog behaviour and training company dogLOGIC based in Sydney. As Trudi says "DOGS DOGS DOGS...A childhood obsession that I never grew out of." She devises and implements individual behavioural strategies and obedience techniques based on 18 years of studying dog problems and problem dogs.

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Ask Trudi a question regarding behaviour by emailing [behaviour@urbananimal.net](mailto:behaviour@urbananimal.net)



Dear Trudi,

I have a 10 month-old male Ridgeback x who is not desexed. He has been well socialised as a puppy and I take him to obedience every Sunday morning. He has been a happy, friendly boy with both people and other dogs, until recently when I have seen changes in his personality and behaviour that quite frankly, are starting to concern me. His play seems to be developing into bullying with other dogs-including some of which he has played happily with on other occasions. He seems to have developed selective hearing and has just started to ignore me when I call him.

The crunch came last week when up at the dog park he got into a fight with another dog. Thankfully neither dog was hurt but I can't allow this behaviour go on-please help!

Do you think that this is just a stage he is going through? What about desexing him, do you think that might help with his behaviour. I have mentioned it to my partner who is dead against the idea saying that it will change his personality and make him lazy and I have had mixed advice about weight gain from the other people in the park on the subject.

I look forward to hearing from you, Sarah

Hi Sarah,

And welcome to canine adolescence!

All dogs of all breeds pass through a series of developmental stages as they grow and develop mentally and physically-much like we humans do, and from the description you have given of your dog's background and subsequent behaviour, he seems to be right on track!

As a general guide, adolescence begins in dogs of smaller breeds as early as about 5 to 6 months of age, 9 to 10 months of age in larger breeds and as late as 12 to 18 months in giant breeds.

It is at this stage that dogs start viewing the world through different eyes-not a puppy any more they don't need to rely on you as much, and a new type of confidence emerges which in turn encourages a new found freedom and independence. All of a sudden that cute puppy that had followed you around adoringly has somehow mutated into the Devil's spawn with bad manners and selective hearing. Rules have been changed without your consent and

social interaction with other dogs has taken on a whole new meaning. In essence, adolescence can prove to be a very challenging time.

The main drive behind all animals on earth is to reproduce-and dogs are no exception. Male dogs, once they reach a certain age, are instinctively driven to seek and find a bitch that is ready to mate and this is where the problems start. Intact (or undesexed) males are entirely focused on not only finding a mate but more importantly fending off any other males (or dominant females) whom they perceive as a possible threat. This changes the common rules that are generally adopted by the majority of dogs when they are on common ground, ie the park, because an intact male cannot take the chance that another male will claim the park as 'territory', thereby giving them the advantage.

In short, this means that an intact male will view most male dogs and some dominant female dogs as a potential threat and so, will start behaving aggressively toward them. This starts out as an instinctual behaviour, but WILL develop into a learned behaviour if not dealt with in the early stages. An entire male dog is so driven to find a mate that he may jump high fences and tear through walls in order to satisfy this urge. This obviously may lead to him becoming lost, seriously injured or worse.

If you do not intend to breed from your boy, it is far kinder and fairer to have him desexed as soon as possible and so take away much of the anxiety and stress which is associated with a dog that is not.

Desexing WILL NOT change his personality nor will it influence the relationship he has with you or your partner. It will however slightly alter his metabolism, but by cutting his calorie intake by about 10% and maintaining his current activity level, weight gain should not become an issue. Desexing also significantly reduces the possibility of any prostate related problems later in life.

It is your responsibility to provide the necessary education and afford him all the opportunities required to ensure he lives a full, happy and contented life. Having him desexed, taking a leadership role and continuing his training will all go a long way in helping you to guide him in the right direction.

Dear Trudi,

I was wondering if you would have any ideas to stop my 13 month-old beagle from dining on his faeces. He never likes the morning one but the others yes. Also, he runs and hides from me to do his business so he can eat it before I run to clean and mop it up. Please help. Baking powder and pepper do not work.

Thanks,  
Mary

Hi Mary,

The subject of dogs eating their own faeces (or that of others) is a socially sensitive subject indeed. The behaviour (also known as coprophagy), not only makes his toilet habits most unpleasant, it also makes his kisses unbearable!!!

But as abhorrent as we may find this particular behaviour it is a relatively common one. There are various theories as to why our disdain is not shared by those dogs that indulge in it. These include dietary deficiencies, attention

seeking behaviour, insufficient nutrients maintained during digestion and then of course the reality that some dogs may simply enjoy it.

Due to the fact that very little is understood about exactly why they do it, it is important to determine whether the coprophagy is of behavioural or medical origin, so the first thing I would recommend is a full check up with your vet to rule out any dietary imbalances or underlying medical issues.

Assuming all is ok from the vet's perspective, and you need to deal with it on a behavioural level, the most effective way to go about this is to counter condition - or change his current mind set. This involves starting from scratch and re-educating him as far as his toileting routine is concerned. Start by attaching a long light lead to his collar when it is toilet time and allow him space to move around freely (ie don't stand over him). Once he has gone to the toilet and before he has the opportunity to eat it, give the lead a firm tug and call him to you in an upbeat manner whilst reeling him in. Once he has reached you, praise lavishly and reward him with a tasty morsel, but rather than a dog treat, I would suggest upping the calibre of 'yum' to something like a little piece of BBQ chicken (no bone).

Because the action of running and hiding to eat his faeces is a direct result of your reaction to his unsavoury behaviour-it is really important that you remain positive at all times in order to achieve success. Praise him as you take him inside and then leave him there whilst you clean up after him to ensure that he doesn't go back for seconds.

By repeating this daily, it won't be long before he realises that coming to you after going to the toilet is a lot more rewarding than eating what he has just done.

Assessing his diet may also assist in curbing his behaviour. Premium dry foods are digested easily before being passed, so the end result is drier and less palatable and so is not as appealing. It's a good idea to discuss all dietary aspects with your vet before making any changes.

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