



No Kill  
South Carolina  
2024

# CHARLESTON ANIMAL SOCIETY DOG RESOURCES

## SUBMISSIVE AND EXCITEMENT URINATION IN DOGS

Urination accompanied by submissive behavior is known as submissive urination. The underlying cause of submissive urination is fear. A number of triggers such as a person approaching, punishment, scolding, and a deep and loud voice can cause dogs of any age to urinate submissively. Signs of submissive behavior to look for are flattening of the ears, avoiding eye contact, lowering of head and neck, sitting or cowering, tucking the tail, or rolling onto back and exposing the belly. Some causes of submissive urination are a traumatic early experience, a sheltered puppyhood, a history of punishment, unintentional reinforcement of the behavior by the owner, and a potentially genetic predisposition. Submissive urination can sometimes be confused with excitement urination. With excitement urination, submissive signals are absent and urination occurs while standing or walking during greetings and playtime. This behavior occurs more frequently with puppies and can resolve with age. Potential causes are accidental reinforcement of the behavior by the owner, decreased bladder sphincter tone, and a genetic predisposition.

Reasons why your dog may be submissively urinating:

- Your dog feels he or she is being confronted by someone perceived to be threatening.
- Your dog sees threatening cues, such as staring, fast movements, or people leaning over the dog.
- Your dog is attempting to show signs of submission in order to allay these threats. This submissive behavior is considered normal.
- If you punish your dog while he or she is submissively urinating, the dog will continue to urinate in attempts to reduce the threat while it is happening.

Reasons why your dog may be excitedly urinating:

- Your dog is being stimulated to urinate by actions such as greeting with high-energy eye, verbal, or physical contact.
- Your dog is engaged in active behavior while demonstrating his or her own signs of excitement, both physical and physiological, and not exhibiting submission or fear. Other potential reasons for submissive or excitement urination:
  - Incomplete housetraining
  - Marking behavior
  - Separation anxiety
  - Medical conditions, such as urinary bladder dysfunction

Treatment - Things to do:

- Rule out a medical cause by bringing your dog to the veterinarian.
- Gently and calmly greet and interact with your dog.
- Get down to the dog's level when petting or giving attention, so it doesn't feel threatened by someone "hovering" over it.
- Pet the dog under the chin rather than on top of the head
- Approach the dog from the side rather than from the front, and don't stare directly at the dog.





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# ANIMAL RESOURCES

- If the problem occurs upon your returning home due to the dog's excitement, ignore the dog right upon walking in the door. Wait about 5 minutes for them to calm down before giving them attention. At this point, ask guests to ignore the dog at least at first.
- Limit water access to certain predictable times of the day so that outdoor potty schedules can be planned accordingly.
- When the dog submissively urinates, ignore it. Scolding will make things worse, as well as acknowledging the dog with praise may confuse it.
- Use treats rather than physical praise, such as petting.
- Incorporate clicker training to help indicate end of the greeting.
- Build your dog's confidence by teaching obedience commands using positive reinforcement methods with treats and praise.

Treatment: Things NOT to do:

- Do not scold or punish the dog; this will make things worse.
- Don't stare directly at the dog's eyes.
- Don't lean or hover over the dog.
- Don't acknowledge the dog in any way when it does urinate.

In summary, it is important to first rule-out any possible medical reasons for why your dog is inappropriately urinating. Take note of any patterns of behavior or stimuli that are related to the submissive or excitation urination. Please see your veterinarian to begin discussing these clinical and/or behavioral signs and to design a treatment plan.

Handout created as part of a class exercise by veterinary students:  
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