
“He Knows He’s Been Bad”

We often assume that our dog KNOWS that he's been bad because when we return home, we find him hiding, slinking around with his tail between his legs, and looking very guilty. In dog language, what he is saying is; "Oh no, I know you're angry, I know you're going to scold me - please don't beat me or yell at me." And what do we do? We yell at or spank our dog. Dogs often seem to know you're upset because they are able to detect even a fractional increase in your heart rate, breathing, and body language. All these things signal to the dog that you are angry. It's rare that a dog showing obvious signs of submission will be further harassed by another dog so when we continue to scold him after he has made his submissive or "I'm so sorry, I'm just a worthless worm," gesture, he becomes even more confused. In an effort to appease you, he may even start to submissively urinate. If this has already happened, see our pamphlet on Submissive Urination. If the dog is pushed too far, he may feel that he needs to defend himself from you because you aren't acting normal and can't be trusted -so he may start to growl to try to bite you.

Dogs that are left alone for even a couple of hours long for your return. On the one hand, they are happy that your are coming home, but on the other hand, they are worried that you may be angry or aggressive when you do return. This creates a lot of psychological stress. When dogs are stressed, they often become hyperactive and vent their excess energy in a doggie fashion by barking, chewing, or digging. Stress can often stimulate their bowels and cause them to soil your house too. More often than not, punishing a dog long after (or even a few minutes after they have misbehaved leads to more and bigger problems.

So your dog acts like he knows that he has done wrong, but he keeps on doing the wrong thing. Since your tactics so far haven't stopped him from misbehaving while you're away, let's see how you CAN correct the misbehaviour.

Dogs have a unique way of learning; whatever they are doing at the very INSTANT they receive either a reward or a reprimand that is what they **are** learning to do or not to do. So if you come home and scold your dog when he runs to greet you, you are punishing him for saying hello. The only effective way to teach your dog not to misbehave is to catch him in the act of misbehaving and reprimand him then. And the only way to prevent him from misbehaving when no one is there to correct him, is to confine your dog in a place where he can do no damage. (See information on Confinement.)

For example, if your dog steals laundry from the basket and you scold him while he's sitting in a corner ripping it to shreds, then you're teaching him not to rip up clothing when you're around to see him. He will soon learn to misbehave only when you're not looking. What we really need to do is teach him to stop raiding the basket. You must reprimand him just before or during the act of the raid. You can either set him up to be caught or you can booby trap the basket itself.

For more details, read our pamphlets on Booby Traps, Trouble Shooting, and Communicating With A Dog. If your dog is destructive or soiling your home, read the appropriate pamphlets on chewing, digging, or house soiling.