



Dr. Hunthausen's Articles in the *KC Star*

[Teach your Pup To Come When Called](#) July 01, 2006

The most important obedience command to teach a puppy is to come to you when you call it. This is more than just a convenience at the off-leash park; it can be a life-saving command for your pet.

[How To Keep Kitty From Clawing Your Furniture](#) May 31, 2006

Cats scratch to sharpen their claws and mark their territory. This is natural, instinctive behavior. But it can be destructive to furniture and other household items unless preventive measures are taken. Try these tactics: ...

[Puppy Housetraining](#) Tuesday, April. 25, 2006

Wouldn't it be nice to just sit down with your new puppy and have a conversation about the right and wrong places for the pooch to "do its business"? House training is a bit more complicated than that, but it's really based on the simple premise that your dog can be trained to prefer one surface over another for the purpose of "doing what it needs to doo-doo."

[Protect Your Dog From Parvo Virus](#) Monday, March 27, 2006

Recently a local animal shelter was temporarily closed because of an outbreak of canine parvovirus. The bug that caused the closing is a nasty little organism. Dogs become infected with the virus when they come into contact with another infected dog or with a contaminated environment. The virus is shed in the dog's feces. It takes three to seven days for the virus to incubate before the pet becomes ill, but once the signs appear a dog can become very sick in as little as 12 hours.

[Your Best Friend Needs Dental Care, Too](#) Tuesday, February. 28, 2006

This is the first in a regular series of monthly articles on pets, pet behavior and pet health, contributed by Wayne Hunthausen, a Westwood-based veterinarian. Hunthausen is a popular guest on Kansas City area radio programs and a frequently published authority on animal behavior.

Teach Your Pup To Come When Called

The most important obedience command to teach a puppy is to come to you when you call it. This is more than just a convenience at the off-leash park; it can be a life-saving command for your pet. Teach the command in five easy phases:

1. At puppy's dinner time, take a handful of dry food and toss a piece about 6 feet away from you for the pup to chase. As soon as the pup eats the food, say its name in a very upbeat tone. When it looks, show it a second piece of food and wave your hand toward you as you say "Come." When the pup runs up to you, ask it to sit and give it the food. Repeat the toss and recall 15 to 20 more times. Do this exercise indoors daily for two weeks.
2. Repeat the previous exercise outdoors for two weeks.
3. Follow your puppy around the yard. Whenever it looks at you (and *only* when it looks at you), say its name and call it to you to sit for a piece of food. Release it to continue sniffing and playing in the yard. Repeat daily for two or more weeks. (This phase assumes that the sit command has been mastered.)

4. Follow your puppy around the yard and call it when it is looking away from you. Begin when it is not distracted, and then call it when it is more distracted.

5. Practice in an off-leash park or a large field. Attach 30 to 50 feet of light nylon line to your pet's collar. This will give you some control in case it gets distracted and starts to run after a rabbit or squirrel. Go back to phases three and four, initially calling the pup only when it is looking at you, then when it is least distracted and finally when it is more distracted. Each time it comes when called, ask it to sit for a treat and then release it.

Once your puppy is dependable in coming when called, gradually phase out the food and give it praise instead. These lessons help teach the pet its name and to pay attention when you say it. It also teaches the pup to run up to you and sit, not jump on you.

How To Keep Kitty From Clawing Your Furniture

When it comes to destructive behavior, cats can't hold a candle to dogs. One dog I treated chewed through a wall and two doors during a thunderstorm. Another dog with separation anxiety trashed a \$5,000 remodel job when he chewed through a water pipe and flooded the home. But cats can come close when their scratching ruins an expensive antique or shreds a leather sofa.

Cats scratch to sharpen their claws, visually mark territory and also to place pheromone scents from glands in their paws. Routine nail trimming can minimize damage. Teach your cat to scratch a post by providing one with a surface the cat likes that is stable and tall. Besides carpet-covered posts, try a rope-covered post or a fireplace log secured to a plywood base. Toss a small treat every time the pet approaches the post, and a larger one whenever it makes contact.

Keep your cat within eyesight and interrupt problem scratching with a squirt from a water gun without saying anything. You just want to stop the behavior without scaring it. Whenever you can't watch the pet, confine it to an area with few objects it might damage. In time you can gradually allow more freedom without supervision.

To prevent damage when you are not around, you can:

- a. Hang a movement detector alarm (e.g. doorknob alarm) on the corner of the furniture.
- b. Hang a towel over the side of the furniture with several empty aluminum cans stacked on top. When the cat scratches, the cans will tumble down.
- c. Hang a towel over the side of the furniture with several empty aluminum cans stacked on top. When the cat scratches, the cans will tumble down.
- d. Cover the furniture with plastic or canvas drop cloths.
- e. Attach a tissue with a strong citrus fragrance to the side of the furniture.

A study in Europe found that the feline facial pheromone product, FELIWAY™ is also effective in decreasing scratching behavior, especially when the behavior is territorial.

Puppy Houstraining

One of most important tasks for the new puppy owner is to train the new family member where it's expected to "do it's business." An while it sure would be nice to just sit down and have a little conversation with the pet to explain what you want, that's not going to happen. Houstraining can seem a bit daunting at first, but it's really based on a fairly simple premise. What you are essentially doing is surface preference training. This is accomplished by teaching the pup to distinguish between various surfaces in its environment and to choose a specific surface for eliminating. The process

involves reinforcing the desired behavior, while at the same time preventing all other undesired behavior (i.e. eliminating on carpet, tile, etc. in the home) until the pup develops the desired habit.

Teaching the pup where you want it to eliminate is the easy part. I try to take my new, young pups out about every hour for the first week or two, then gradually increase the interval between outings. The times when you particularly want to see that the little rascal gets outdoors include after eating or drinking, upon waking, after vigorous periods of play, prior to confinement and whenever you catch it intently sniffing about, suggesting it need a bathroom break. When the pet eliminates in the yard, lightly praise it and then give a small piece of the food you normally feed at dinner time, immediately before going back indoors.

The real challenge in houstraining is to prevent accidents in the home while training the pet to go outdoors. Until the pet has gone for at least four consecutive weeks without soiling in the home, it should be within eyesight of a family member 100% of the time. If you let the pup sneak off and it eliminates in the home as little as once per week, you are unlikely to accomplish your training goal. When you are away from the home, sleeping or too busy to supervise, the pet should be confined to a relatively small area. If the duration on confinement is not too long and the pup is healthy and old enough, it will not soil its sleeping area. Crates can be helpful as long as they are not over used. The maximum amount of time a pup should spend in that small of a confinement area is all night while it sleeps, but no longer than four hours on a daily basis. If the family is away from home for more than four hours every day, the pup needs a larger area. A four by four foot exercise pen or a small room with the floor covered with paper would be good choices.

Once at least four consecutive dry weeks have passed, you can begin to gradually allow the pet to have more unsupervised freedom around the home. If there are some areas where the pet made multiple mistakes during training, there are few things that can be done to prevent resoiling. Since most dogs won't eliminate where they eat, a frequently soiled area can be changed to a feeding station by placing the pet's food and water bowl at the scene of the crime. Leaving toys piled in the area may also help.

The big question pet owners always have for me is "What should I do if the pet eliminates in the home?" The only thing that you should do, but only if you catch it in the act, is make a sharp noise (e.g. clap hands, slap a table top) to interrupt the behavior without scaring the pup. Punishment is generally a poor tool for training young pups. There is a real risk for developing shyness, avoidance behaviors and even fear-related aggressive behaviors. Not to mention the fact that it will likely bruise your relationship during a time when you should be getting to know each other and developing trust.

Protect Your Dog From Parvo Virus

Recently, there was a flurry of news stories regarding the temporary closing of a local animal shelter due to an outbreak of Canine Parvovirus. The bug that caused the closing is a nasty little organism. It's related to a group of viruses that cause life-threatening disease in a variety of species including cats, raccoons and mink. Canine Parvovirus was first isolated in 1978, and studies of dog blood samples have shown no evidence that it even existed prior to 1974.

The virus is shed in the feces of an infected dog. Other dogs become exposed through contact with the dog or a contaminated environment. It takes about three to seven days for the virus to incubate before the pet becomes ill, but once the signs appear a dog can become very sick within as short a period as twelve hours. The virus infects rapidly dividing cells in the intestine, lymph system and bone marrow. It causes severe gastrointestinal disease including vomiting and profuse, bloody diarrhea. It also compromises the immune system leading to secondary bacterial infections. Infected dogs are very lethargic, refuse to eat, run a fever and can have severe abdominal pain. The virus can

also cause heart disease and acute death in very young puppies, although this syndrome is rarely seen anymore. It is estimated that about 90% of dogs become sick following exposure and more than 50% may die. Some dogs have enough immunity that exposure to the virus does not make them ill, but the virus can temporarily live in them and they can serve as a source of infection to other dogs. A combination of dehydration and secondary infection are what usually leads to the death of the animal. Doberman Pinscher and Rottweiler breeds tend to be at higher risk of infection and experience more severe signs of the disease.

Clinical signs are very classic and most veterinarians will quickly recognize a dog that is infected with parvovirus. Confirmation is accomplished by blood or fecal testing. Unfortunately, there is no medication that will specifically stop this virus. Treatment involves aggressive supportive care to fight the dehydration, ward off secondary infections and maintain the pet's physical strength. This entails aggressive fluid therapy, antibiotics, nutritional support and nursing care.

Prevention involves controlling strays, isolating infected dogs and vaccinating susceptible animals. An infected dog may be contagious for up to 14 to 21 days after exposure and, to be safe, should have no contact with other dogs or be allowed out in the neighborhood during that time. Parvovirus is an especially hardy organism that is resistant to many common disinfectants and can survive for months in the environment. It is prudent to wait at least six months before bringing a young puppy into an environment that had been contaminated with the virus.

Vaccines are crucial for safeguarding pet dogs from this horrible disease. Newer vaccines are very effective for prevention and should be given at three to four week intervals beginning at six to eight weeks of age and continued until the pet is 16 weeks of age or older. Adult dogs should be revaccinated every one to three years, depending on the veterinarian's risk assessment and the type of vaccine used. Viral infections tend to peak during the spring of each year, so now is the time to be sure that your pet's vaccinations are up to date.

Your Best Friend Needs Dental Care, Too

Would you like to add two to three years to your pet's life? Then start brushing his teeth. Daily brushing will keep your pet's breath smelling fresh, as well as help prevent dental disease and tooth loss. But there are even more important benefits to be gained from regular dental care. Dirty teeth are teeming with nasty bacteria which enter the blood stream and cause disease in the heart, kidneys, liver, joints and lungs, shortening your pet's life. Unhealthy teeth are just the tip of the iceberg regarding dangerous processes that may be affecting your pet's overall health.

Periodontal disease is the culprit and involves the progressive destruction and loss of tissues supporting the teeth. It begins with the accumulation of plaque following meals. Within 24 to 48 hours the plaque becomes hardened into tartar. This leads to inflammation of the gums and progresses to involve important tissues below the gum line that hold the teeth in place. Mild gum disease is usually reversible, but damage to the deeper tissues is not. That is why timely intervention and cleaning is so important. Plaque can easily be removed by brushing, but tartar must be removed by your veterinarian.

Dental care should begin when your pet is a puppy or kitten. First, you'll want to get the pet used to having the mouth handled. Everyday, you should gently massage its mouth, progressing to gently lifting the lips and touching the teeth. Next, you can introduce it to some great tasting liver or chicken toothpaste by applying the paste to gauze wrapped around your finger. When the pet is used to this and has finished teething (around six months of age), you can introduce a pet toothbrush with soft bristles. Although brushing three or more times each week is the best way to get rid of plaque, there are other things that will help. Talk to your veterinarian about dental diets, special rawhide

chews, rinses and sprays that will keep the mouth healthy. Look for products labeled with the Veterinary Oral Health Council seal of approval or go to their website (vohc.org) to find products that have undergone extensive scientific testing and have been shown to be effective. While sometimes suggested, using metal scalers on an unanesthetized pet to remove tartar should be avoided. This can cause gum damage and scratches on the tooth surface which will make things worse.

Even with regular home care, your pet's teeth will periodically need care by your family veterinarian. Dental prophylaxis is done under a general anesthetic. This allows the doctor to fully examine the mouth, probing the gum line for periodontal problems, looking for tumors and taking X-ray films to insure that roots and surrounding bone are in good shape. These are procedures that can't effectively be done to a pet that is awake. An anesthetized exam and X-ray films are especially important since our pets can't always tell us when an emerging dental problem is causing pain or discomfort. Following the exam, the tartar will be scaled off, the teeth polished and a fluoride treatment will be applied. Newer anesthetics, preanesthetic laboratory testing, sophisticated monitoring devices and intravenous fluid support all help make this a very safe procedure.

Veterinary dental care is a rapidly growing field. Years ago, the solution for broken or maloccluded teeth was extraction. Now, root canal treatment, caps to protect fractured teeth and orthodontics to correct painful problems associated with an abnormal bite are available. More information regarding veterinary dentistry can be obtained from the American Veterinary Dental Society (avds-online.org) and the American Veterinary Dental College (avdc.org)

February is Pet Dental Health Month. Make a dental appointment with your family veterinarian this month for the health and longevity of your pet. It's a small investment to help insure quality of life and longevity for your special friend.

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