

# Whining



Whining is one of many forms of canine vocal communication. Dogs most commonly whine when they're seeking attention, when they're excited, when they're anxious or when they're trying to appease you.

## Why Do Dogs Whine?

### Appeasement Behavior

Some dogs whine excessively when interacting with people and other dogs, usually while adopting a submissive posture (e.g., tail tucked, body lowered, head down, gaze averted).

### Greeting Behavior

Some dogs whine during greetings. This kind of vocalization is usually motivated by excitement and may be directed at dogs or people.

### Seeking Attention

Some dogs whine in the presence of their owners in order to get attention, rewards or desired objects.

### Anxiety

Some dogs whine in response to stressful situations. In this context, whining sometimes seems involuntarily.

Other Problems That Might Cause Whining

## Separation Anxiety

If your dog only whines just before you leave or during your absence, she may have separation anxiety. If this is the case, your dog will usually display at least one other symptom of the disorder prior to your departure or when left alone, such as pacing, panting, excessive drooling, destruction (especially around doors and windows), urinating or defecating indoors, depression or other signs of distress. For more information about this problem, please see our article, [Separation Anxiety](#).

## Injury or Medical Condition

Dogs often whine in response to pain or a painful condition. If you notice that your dog vocalizes frequently or has suddenly started to vocalize, it's important to take her to the vet to rule out medical causes.

## **What to Do About Excessive Whining**

### Appeasement Whining

Dogs can try to appease people or other dogs when they perceive a threat or aggression being directed at them. Appeasement behaviors include holding the ears back, tucking the tail, crouching or rolling over on the back, avoiding eye contact or turning the body sideways to the perceived threat. Appeasement whining is also a normal canine behavior. You may be able to reduce your dog's appeasement whining by building her confidence. Try taking her to an obedience class that uses reward-based training techniques. You and your dog can also try trick-training classes or dog sports like agility, flyball and musical freestyle (a combination of heeling and tricks performed to music). Playing fun, interactive games with your dog, like tug and fetch, can increase your dog's confidence. Avoid physical and verbal punishment. Avoid physical and verbal punishment. Intimidating your dog will only decrease her confidence level and may increase appeasement whining.

### Whining During Greetings

If your dog whines when greeting people, you can divert her attention to her favorite toys. Simply telling your dog to be quiet during greetings usually isn't effective because, unless you've taken specific steps to teach your dog what the word "Quiet" means, she won't understand you. Additionally, most dogs whine when greeting people because they're excited, and in an extremely aroused state, they may not have control over their behavior. Instead, use management procedures to help prevent your dog from becoming overly excited. For example, downplay greetings, keeping them short and simple. Avoid speaking in excited, loud tones, and keep your movements slow and calm. Wait to pet and interact with your dog until she's less excited. It may

also help to teach her to do something you'd like her to do instead of whining, such as sitting or hand targeting when she greets you or other people. Your dog may whine a lot less if she's busy performing some other, politer behavior instead.

## How to Teach Hand Targeting

Try teaching your dog to touch an outstretched palm with her nose during greetings to help her stay calm.

- Hold your outstretched palm right in front of your dog's face, and wait for her to touch it with the tip of her nose. Don't say anything. Just wait. If she isn't paying attention at all, you can say her name to get her focused on you, but don't say anything else and don't move your hand toward your dog. Your touching your palm to her nose won't help teach her to move her nose toward your palm. If your dog doesn't touch your hand at first, you can try removing it and then presenting it again, or moving it side to side in front of her face, or rubbing a treat on your palm to encourage your dog to sniff it. As soon as you feel your dog's nose touch your palm, say "Yes!" and feed her a small treat from your other hand.
- When your dog touches your palm reliably 9 out of 10 times in a row, start to present your hand in different places. Hold it out to the side of your dog's face, down toward the floor and a few inches away so that your dog has to move toward it to make contact. Finally, hold your palm up above her head so she has to reach up to touch it. Always remember to say "Yes!" as soon as you feel your dog's nose make contact with your hand, and then feed her a treat.
- When your dog touches your hand 9 out of 10 times in a row, regardless of where you're holding it, then introduce a cue or command for the behavior, such as, "Say hello." First say the cue then present your hand and wait for your dog to touch it. When she does, say "Yes!" and give her a treat.
- Incorporate your dog's friends and family into the training. Practice her new skill in a variety of places: your home, a friend's home and on the street during leash walks. Ask friends who your dog knows and likes and who walk along your regular route and stop to greet your dog so she can practice hand targeting with them. Remember to keep rewarding her when she responds correctly.
- The next step is to generalize the training to people your dog doesn't know. In advance, tell a friend who's never met your dog what to do when meeting her. Then invite the person to your home or arrange to meet while you're taking a walk with your dog. During the meeting, if the stranger presents his or her hand and your dog seems confused, help her out. Remind her what to do by asking her to touch your hand first a few times. Then ask the stranger to try again.
- From this point on, if someone wants to greet your dog, either in your home or out in the world, explain that he or she should simply put out a hand and wait for your dog to approach. You can cue your dog by saying, "Say hello." After your dog touches the person's hand with her nose, she'll turn back to you for her treat. In the event that the person ignores your request and reaches out to pat your dog,

she should feel relatively relaxed because she's expecting the person to extend a hand to be touched!

- Be careful not to reward your dog if she performs this new behavior when you haven't asked her to do so by at least raising your hand to her. Some dogs can get pushy and will approach people to touch their hands, even when the people do not want to interact. Reward your dog for touching only when you've given the cue.

### **Attention-Seeking Whining**

If your dog uses whining behavior to seek attention, rewards or desired objects, you need to teach her that remaining quiet is a better strategy. Sometimes reducing attention-seeking whining may be difficult because owners may unwittingly reinforce the behavior. Realize that any eye contact, touching or talking to your dog—even if you're scolding her—all constitute attention. Use dramatic body language such as turning away from your dog or folding your arms across your chest and completely ignore her to indicate to your dog that her attention-seeking whining won't work.

In addition to not reinforcing whining behavior, you need to reward your dog for being quiet. Teach your dog that she must always be quiet before receiving your attention, play or treats. Regularly seek out your dog to give her attention and rewards when she's not whining. When your dog understands that silence works well to get your attention, she won't feel as motivated to whine.

Don't hesitate to contact a professional in your area. Many professionals offer group or private classes that can give you and your dog lots of great skills to learn and games to play that will reduce her appeasement whining, whining during greetings and attention-seeking whining.

### **Anxious Whining**

Whining as a result of anxiety is difficult to eliminate unless the cause of anxiety is removed. Anxious whining is usually accompanied by other nervous behaviors, such as pacing, circling and licking. Many anxious dogs do not seem able to control their whining when under extreme stress.

Some medications may help reduce your dog's anxiety. Consult a Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist (CAAB or ACAAB) or a board-certified veterinary behaviorist (Dip ACVB) to learn more about anti-anxiety medications.

