

From Your Vet



Are you *stressing* your dog?

If your dog seems anxious or tense, make sure you refrain from making these 10 canine faux-pas, which could trigger behavior problems.

1. Punish your dog. Dogs are creatures of opportunity, so avoid opportunities for them to get into trouble. If you leave trash or your personal items where your dog can get them, she will explore the wonderful-smelling tidbits and assume they're hers. If you value your things, keep them picked up and put away.

2. Keep telling your dog "no." When you tell your dog "no," she likely will stop the behavior but then repeat it a short time later—making the "no" simply an interrupter. Skeptical? Try saying "pickle" instead of "no," and the same pattern of stopping then repeating the behavior is likely to return. Instead, show your dog what you want her to do.

3. Assume your dog understands English. Animals communicate using body language and are very good at figuring us out, but they have no command of language. So, unless you have taught your dog to "drop it," "leave it," "come" or any other commands, she may not actually know these terms. Using them without sufficient training will result in stress as your dog attempts to guess what you want.

4. Expect your dog to "love everyone." Just like you, not all dogs love all other people and animals. Some dogs are social butterflies; others would prefer to stay home enjoying a nice toy. Dragging your "introverted" dog to many places in the hopes of socializing her will likely result in frustration and anxiety.

5. Pull on the leash. Leash pulling is miscommunication at its best. You walk slow, your dog walks fast. Your dog is frustrated that he has to pull that lazy human around; meanwhile, you think your dog is being stubborn, willful or disobedient. Bridge this gap in communication and reduce frustration all around by teaching your dog—in a humane way—to walk on a loose leash.

6. Hug or kiss your dog. Do you like when someone holds onto you so you can't move away? Dogs generally don't like to be hugged and kissed—especially by strangers. Restraining a dog so it can't get away puts you on her "not-to-be-trusted" list.

7. Stare at your dog. Direct, prolonged eye contact with dogs is considered very confrontational. In canine body language, it suggests that you would like to interact—and not necessarily in a good way.

8. Touch your dog or take her food away while she is eating. Imagine you are in a restaurant and your waiter touches your shoulder every time he walks by, or he takes your plate away as soon as you start to eat. If this occurred at every visit we would likely not return to that restaurant. Our pets do not have that luxury. Bothering pets or taking their food away while they are eating will not lead them to be more accepting of people/toddlers being in close proximity while they are eating. To the contrary, it likely teaches dogs to be more concerned

and anxious about people approaching them while eating.

9. Command your pet to "get down" when it's jumping. What word do you use when you want your dog to get into the position where her belly is touching the floor? If it's "down," then when your pet is jumping up to greet a guest, use a different term such as "off," or "four on floor" and teach her what the word means. The name of the cue is irrelevant, as long as you show the dog the action that goes along with it. (See No. 3 above.)

10. Don't "let sleeping dogs lie." Dogs don't like to be bothered while they're sleeping any more than we do. [dvm360](#)

Information was provided by Valarie V. Tynes, DVM, DACVB, DACAV, Premier Veterinary Behavior Consulting, Sweetwater, Texas, and Colleen Koch, DVM, DACVB, Lincoln Land Animal Clinic, Jacksonville, Ill. For more information, check out *Decoding Your Dog: Explaining Common Dog Behaviors and How to Prevent or Change Unwanted Ones*, from the American College of Veterinary Behaviorists.

