

SUBMISSIVE URINATION

Submissive urination is normal canine communication, although not all dogs submissively urinate. Dogs who submissively urinate usually do so during greetings or stressful interactions with people or animals (especially unfamiliar ones), when they're feeling submissive or intimidated, during physical contact like petting, when scolded or punished, and sometimes just when they're highly excited or playing. This is because the urinary sphincter relaxes during stress or excitement. Some dogs produce dribbles of urine, while others void large puddles. When a dog is in a situation that triggers submissive urination, they tend to show submissive postures, such as cowering, lowering the body, raising the front paws, tucking the tail, flattening the ears back, licking the lips or displaying a submissive grin. Although a submissive grin often looks like aggression because it involves a dog showing his teeth, it's not really a threat — it's a smile. Submissive urination is most common in puppies, but some adult dogs submissively urinate as well, especially underconfident or shy ones. The behavior is more common in some breeds than others, such as retrievers and herders. Some dogs submissively urinate only when interacting with their owners, some only with visitors, some only with other dogs, and some with everyone.

What to Do About Submissive Urination

Dogs usually grow out of submissive urination by the time they reach one year of age, even if their owners do nothing about it. However, many people find it messy and unpleasant, and some dogs never grow out of it. If your dog or puppy submissively urinates, the following suggestions can help you manage, minimize or eliminate the behavior. Your goal is to teach your dog to feel confident rather than submissive during greetings.

- To reduce your clean-up chores, when possible greet your dog outside and have guests do the same. Eliminate odor where dog has urinated indoors using an enzymatic cleaner.
- Keep greetings and departures brief and calm.
- Let the dog come to you instead of you approaching them.
- Toss a couple of small treats or a toy toward your dog as they run up to greet you.
- Don't bend toward your dog or loom over them. Your posture should be nonthreatening. Squat down and turn sideways. Ask other people to do the same.
- Squat down with a treat in your hand, turn slightly away from the dog and ignore them. When they come up to you, ask them to sit, and when they do, give them the treat. Repeat this over and over, day after day, until they're comfortable coming to you and sitting.
- Give everyone who greets your dog a treat along with instructions to do the same thing as above. Repeatedly being rewarded for sitting during greetings will build their confidence.

- When you or other people pet your dog, avoid prolonged eye contact, which is threatening to dogs, and touch them under the chin or chest, rather than on top of their head, back or ears.
- In the house, ignore your dog when you first walk through the door. Wait until they are calm before interacting with them — and when you finally do, be calm, move slowly and use a gentle, low tone of voice that won't startle them.

What to Do About Excitement Urination

- In addition to the guidelines above for submissive urination, take your dog for walks more frequently than normal so their bladder is as empty as possible.
- Keep play sessions with your dog low-key and play games with them that focus on toys rather than bodily contact.
- Give your dog aerobic exercise through off-leash hikes, play with other dogs, fetch with a ball or Frisbee. These are great ways to expend the energy that can cause loss of bladder control. Tired dogs don't get as excited as under-exercised ones.

What NOT to Do

- Do not look at your dog, touch them, bend over them or speak to them if they start to submissively urinate or if you think they might.
- Do not hug your dog or pat them on top of the head or back when greeting or interacting.
- Do not scowl or frown at your dog, especially in response to submissive urination. You should even avoid making frustrated comments or noises since it can make the behavior worse.
- Do not scold or yell, behave angrily, or punish your dog in any way. Scolding and punishment make the problem worse. The more you yell at your dog, the more they'll want to submissively urinate, thinking it will appease you and make you less angry.