



RSPCA School for Dogs Information Sheet

Mounting and Humping Behaviour

Why does my dog display mounting behaviour? Is it normal?

You often see dogs mounting toys/objects, other dogs and people. Rest assured it is completely normal! However it is inappropriate and embarrassing.

The function of mounting behaviour is primarily sexual and one of those pre-programmed behaviours that most dogs are born with. This is called a fixed action pattern (FAP). These FAPs are triggered by the dog's environment without any prior learning. So this is why you see young puppies displaying this behaviour like an old pro!

Mounting is an early part of communication development in young puppies and often seen in play challenges (Overall 1997). It can increase in frequency and intensity as the dog approaches sexual maturity and can easily turn into an attention seeking behaviour by both male and female dogs.

Triggers - Play, excitement, conflict/stress

General arousal can easily tip over to sexual arousal. Triggers such as play (with humans and other dogs) and excitement (e.g. when someone arrives home after being away at work the whole day) can often lead to mounting behaviour being displayed.

Mounting can also occur in conflict situations that cause mild frustration or anxiety - settings where a dog wants to do something, but isn't allowed to, and funnels the energy into another totally unrelated behaviour (Messer 2012).

Is it a display of dominance?

When your dog or puppy mounts a pillow or toys it usually gets a laugh and people don't usually find it upsetting, but when a dog or puppy mounts people it usually raises concerns about the mounting being interpreted as a display of dominance.

Given that the primary function of mounting is clearly sexual, and the frequency with which it pops up within play and other stimulating situations, jumping to the conclusion that a dog who mounts a person or another dog is displaying dominance is faulty (Messer 2012).

Prevention

If you know when the behaviour usually occurs (e.g. the triggers), help your puppy or dog to be calm in these situations and give them something to do (such as a chew) to bring their excitement level down.

You should also teach a reliable recall to call your dog away from other dogs or items. Refer to our "come when called" info sheet for tips.

What do I do when I see this behaviour? Should I interrupt it?

If you find it problematic (it is usually considered problematic when mounting is displayed to humans or other dogs), then teach an alternative behaviour such as 'leave it' or 'sit'. Try to cue your dog or puppy to do this before they get too excited.



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Use a toy to distract your dog or puppy. Using a tug toy can distract a puppy or dog and focus their attention on playing with you more appropriately.

Use a 'timeout' to teach your dog or puppy that if he engages in the mounting behaviour, it results in no social contact for a short period (no longer than 30 seconds otherwise they'll forget why they are in timeout!).

Be aware that it is far easier to prevent the behaviour than to interrupt it! In the situations where you see the mounting behaviour, be prepared to step in and distract your dog to help reduce his excitement level.

What do I NOT do when I see this behaviour?

Try not to laugh! Laughing at your dog or puppy will only reinforce the behaviour.

Do not use any form of punishment or aggressive methods. This will only make your dog scared of you, confused, and not teach them what is expected of them.

References

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