



Jasper County Animal Rescue League and Humane Society

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Territorial Marking Behavior in Dogs and Cats

What is territorial marking?

Dogs and cats are territorial animals that feel a need to establish an area as their own. Because dogs and cats are territorial, they need a way to distinguish their territory from other animals. There are many methods which animals use to distinguish their territory including visual and scent cues. Some methods include barking, fighting, scratch marks, or leaving scent from special glands on their head and anal areas. Another of the scent cues is the use of urine and sometimes feces. Animals deposit small amounts of urine in pertinent areas of what they consider their territory.

How can I tell if my pet is marking or just eliminating?

Normally our pets are trained to eliminate in specific areas like litter boxes or outside. If your pet is leaving small amounts of urine in distinctive areas of the house, he may be marking his territory. Other clues that lead to a territory marking problems include:

- If the urine is found on vertical surfaces like walls, furniture legs or curtains.
- If the urine is found near views to the outside like windows or doors.
- If the urine is found near important areas for the animal like his favorite resting spot.
- If the urine is found on unfamiliar objects in the home that have different scents like a new purse or a visitor's coat.

Why does my pet want to mark his territory?

A marking behavior is NOT a housetraining problem. It generally starts because the animal feels anxious or feels he needs to assert his dominance because his territory is being threatened. The reason(s) why your pet is marking must first be addressed before the marking behavior can be resolved. Listed below are some reasons why your pet might feel a need to mark his territory:

- If any pet in the home is NOT spayed or neutered. An intact animal is more likely to mark, but altered animals may mark if there is an intact animal in the home.
- If there are any conflicts with other pets in the home.
- If the pet has contact with animals outside either through a window or direct contact.

What can I do about the marking behavior?

- ✓ Spay or neuter your pet if you have not done so already. If your pet has been marking for a while, this might not eliminate the problem, but it will help.
- ✓ Clean all areas with an enzymatic cleaner specifically designed to eliminate pet odors. Don't use an ammonia-based cleaner as they may cause your pet to mark over the ammonia scent.
- ✓ Make the area unpleasant by placing sticky tape in front of the area or change the significance of the area by feeding or playing with the pet there.
- ✓ Resolve any problems between pets in the home.
- ✓ Restrict access to windows or doors where the pet might see other animals if possible.
- ✓ Keep your cat indoors away from any encounters with other cats that may cause him to mark.
- ✓ Keep unfamiliar objects out of reach (in a closet).
- ✓ If the pet is marking a new family member's belongings (a new baby or spouse), start to have the new member interact in positive ways with the pet like playing, feeding or training the pet.
- ✓ For dogs, let them drag a 6' leash around the house and supervise him. If he starts to mark, give a verbal correction like "wrong" and give the leash one quick pop. When you can't watch the dog confine him to a crate or small room where the dog has not marked.
- ✓ Help establish yourself as the leader by making the dog do something before he gets anything. For example make him sit before he gets food, petting, or a toy.
- ✓ For cats, watch them for any signs of marking. If your cat starts to back up to something with his tail high and quivering, interrupt him with a loud noise or squirt of water. Don't let the cat know you were the source of the noise or water. We want the cat to associate the correction with marking not your presence.

What NOT to do:

- Do NOT punish after the fact. The pet will NOT associate the punishment with the marking behavior.
- Do NOT assume your pet is doing it out of spite or jealousy. Pets are not people and do not experience these emotions.