



Solving Behavior Problems

Why Does My Dog Do That? The ABC Model

Every behavior follows a pattern — once you understand it, you can change it!

A — Antecedent	B — Behavior	C — Consequence
What happens <i>right before</i> the behavior? The trigger or cue.	What does your dog actually <i>do</i> ? Be specific and observable.	What happens <i>right after</i> ? What does your dog get or avoid?

Two real-life examples:

	Jumping on guests	Barking at the mail truck
Antecedent	Guest walks through the door	Mail truck pulls up
Behavior	Dog jumps up, paws on guest's chest	Dog runs to window and barks intensely
Consequence	Guest pets and talks to dog	Mail truck drives away
Why it continues	Jumping = attention, so it keeps happening	From the dog's perspective: <i>"My barking works — the scary truck always leaves!"</i>

Step 1 — Spot the Pattern

Before you can solve the problem, you need to understand it.

- **Find the trigger.** Look for patterns — does your dog bark only when the neighbor's dog passes at 7am? Does begging only happen at family dinner?

- **Watch for early warning signs.** Many dogs signal before the full behavior kicks in — a dog who sits and stares may escalate to pawing or barking. Step in early and redirect to an appropriate behavior.
- **Track the payoff.** What does your dog get out of it?
 - *Trying to get:* food, attention, play, freedom, access to something
 - *Trying to avoid:* boredom, confinement, something scary or uncomfortable

Step 2 — Manage the Environment First

Management means changing the environment so the problem behavior simply can't happen (for instance, using a baby gate, a leash, or other tweaks to the environment to prevent the undesired behavior).

💡 *First, prevent the behavior you don't want. Then, train the behavior you do want.*

Why management matters:

- **Instant relief** — a baby gate or closed curtain works immediately
- **No rehearsal = no habit** — if your dog can't practice it, the habit doesn't stick
- **Sets your dog up for success** rather than waiting for the mistake to happen
- **Sometimes it's enough on its own** — a simple environmental tweak can solve the problem without any training needed

Step 3 — Teach an Alternative Behavior

Once you've managed the environment to reduce rehearsal of the problem behavior, decide what you'd *like* your dog to do instead — and train that.

💡 *Your training plan must give your dog another way to get what they want. Otherwise the problem behavior will keep happening.*

Common problems, management strategies, and alternative behaviors to train:

Problem	Management	Example of alternative behaviors to Train
Jumping on guests	Put dog behind a gate; scatter treats as guests enter; keep a toy by the door	Four paws on the floor; settle on mat; fetch a toy to greet with

Barking at windows/yard	Close curtains; use frosted window film; supervise yard time	Auto check-in / recall
Counter surfing	Clear counters; Gate kitchen	Settle on mat
Inappropriate chewing / stealing	Gate off rooms; put items away; provide access to appropriate toys	Drop it

Step 4 — Check That Your Dog's Needs Are Being Met

Sometimes problem behaviors are just unmet needs looking for an outlet. Before assuming it's a training problem, ask whether your dog has enough of the following:

If your dog is...	They might need...
Chewing or shredding household items	Something appropriate to shred — cardboard, a head of lettuce
Counter surfing or getting into trash	Scent work or treat scavenger hunts
Digging in the yard	A designated digging spot
Pulling on walks to sniff	Longer sniff walks or a longer leash