

Aversives for Dogs



An aversive is something that your dog finds unpleasant. It can be used to discourage her from a particular action or place. Aversives are most effective when you also offer a pleasant alternative to the place or action you need your pet to avoid. Please experiment cautiously and sparingly when choosing an aversive as individual responses will vary. An aversive that is mildly unpleasant for one dog may be terrifying for another and have no effect on yet another. The goal is to apply the aversive at a level that will cause your dog to avoid the action or place without becoming fearful.

Using Textures as Aversives

Apply these textures to places you need your dog to avoid, and add toys or treats to appropriate places to make them more attractive.

Indoors

- Shelf paper with the sticky side up.
- Double-sided carpet tape.

Outdoors

- Irregular/sharp rocks set firmly into dirt.
- Chicken wire set firmly into dirt with the sharp edges rolled under.

Both

- Heavy plastic carpet runner with the pointed side up.

You may need to weight the material firmly or tape it to keep it in place. To protect furniture or floor finishes from sticky substances, attach the aversive material to a piece of foil or heavy plastic and secure that with weights or light tape. Texture aversives are more effective for puppies, small dogs and low-confidence dogs than for those that won't let a little obstacle stand in their way. Easy-to-attach, commercial varieties of texture aversives are available from most pet supply stores.

Using Tastes as Aversives

Apply these substances to places where your dog's mouth should not be, and offer an appropriate item to chew on instead.

- Bitter Apple or similar sprays and gels marketed specifically for taste aversion.
- Some hot sauces.
- Cayenne pepper.
- Citrus odors (colognes, concentrated juices or fresh peels).
- Aloe gel.

Some of these substances may damage furniture or floor finishes, so be sure to test them in a hidden location first. Except for hot sauce and cayenne pepper, these substances should be safe to apply to human skin; however, some individuals may be sensitive to them.

Surprise!

Remote-Controlled Aversives

Available at pet supply stores or easy to make at home, these items are activated by the dog's behavior, so the owner need not be present to apply them.

- Motion detector that reacts with a startling sound or a spray of water.
- Snappy Trainer or an upside-down mouse trap that is securely taped under paper to avoid contact.
- Aluminum pie plate or cookie sheet containing water, pennies, beans or pebbles (balanced precariously).
- Scat Mat (gives a slight static shock).

Human-Controlled Aversives

Use these to interrupt the undesirable behavior; then offer an appropriate alternative.

- Spray bottle or squirt gun filled with water or a combination of water and a little citronella oil. (**NOTE:** Avoid the super-soaker water guns that have a very forceful spray.)
- Loud air horn.
- Whistle.
- Shaker can (soda can containing nails, pennies, beans or pebbles, with the opening securely taped shut).

WARNING: *For fearful dogs, avoid using surprise techniques, especially noises. Also, remember to start out with the lowest level aversive first and experiment cautiously to see what works for your pet.*

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