

Urinary Scent Marking – Sniff Sniff – Party Time! Maureen Ross, MA WHAT, OUR DOG'S NOSE IS S CELL PHONE?

We humans, depending on culture and conditioning, communicate verbally, with narrative and body language. So do our dogs but in a different way. Their noses are essentially their cell phones, and some dogs have upgrades.

Dogs have amazing olfactory (nose cells) that can be 75X greater than ours. Dogs use olfactory, body language and vocal communication to get their messages across to other dogs and us.

***STOP! Breathing in deeply nose-to-navel while focusing intently on what you smell?
Can you do anything at the same time? Neither can dogs, so use sniffing as a reward.
Sniffing helps balance energy in dogs like meditating or exercising does for us.***

Dog parents inquire why their dog urinates far more frequently than necessary, especially when on a walk or meeting / greeting other dogs. In the wild, watching wolf packs, observe how often wolves mark trees and grounds around the periphery (territory). Females and males both mark. If you watch your female dog closely, you'll see some, not all - pick up a leg. Wolves do what is necessary for survival. Domesticated dogs do what they "think" is necessary because it feels good and macho!

Most dogs, with training, socialization, manners, and given an opportunity to navigate their way with other dogs, learn valuable calming / stress signals. By sniffing a tree, the ground of any dog's urine, dogs can discover the age of a young dog and oftentimes – its identity.

Testosterone in male dogs is on the rise at four or five months, reaching a maximum at about 10 months, and adult male at about 18 months – 2 years. At a 10 month peak, testosterone levels can be as much as five times greater than adult levels. ***Think of a teenager or adolescent.***

Most of us wouldn't do in public what we might in private. Well, dogs DO– without embarrassment. Have you ever watched sports – any sports? Notice the gestures. Not so strangely, we humans sometimes forget whose watching us - and mimic our relatives - the Chimpanzees, scratching, picking, snorting - oops – forgot where I was!

***By the way, males dogs love the scent of females in estrus and can smell it for blocks.
The message is, "Woofee, a block party!"***

Walking a Scent Sniffing / Urinating Maniac – Use it to YOUR Advantage! ***Dogs have cell phones in their noses***

I could go on and on about scent marking / differences between wolves and domesticated dogs, but I believe it is more valuable for dog parents to know how these tie into **awareness training** and what to do when your arm is no long connected to your shoulder socket. My tongue felt like sandpaper for days when my Newfie dragged me down a dirt path once all to get to a tree.

Not all lunging, barking dogs are territorial or eager to meet other dogs – but many are especially if they are in the house or backyard for long periods. Believe me when I share, "I get it." I have a huge fenced area, so I'm more likely to open the door rather than walk the dogs, and especially during busy hours (school buses, people arriving home from work). It would drive me nuts! I enjoy walking one dog at a time or with a partner and their dog.

Dogs get bored! Energy balancing resolves many behaviors like jumping, lunging, barking incessantly, and trying to pull our arms out of their sockets to get to a familiar tree or dog park. Allowing dogs, who are safe, to meet, greet and sniff, no matter how embarrassing, is essential. It will make your life/walks easier in the future. Like our cell phone notifications (**BING**) dogs know when they have smelled that before, “Oh, hi, fancy meeting you here; Owner give you a bath? I can barely smell your sweet dog scent. It’s more like coconuts.”

What You Can Do

Socialization and manners (SAM) begins as soon as you get your puppy or adopted dog home. Depending on the age, health and any kind of trauma a dog has been through, SAM should be gauged to the dog’s level of comfort and excitability.

Awareness begins with us, observing and getting to know our dog’s drives, thresholds, likes and dislikes. Walking dogs on a regular basis is one of the best ways to teach, “Easy, by your side, Wait”. Start, stop and redirect (turn around) many times during walks. Zigzag bushes, trees and benches. It helps to re-start calmness, changing the dog’s sight of vision, and giving you a chance to take back control.

Notice what is going on 10 feet away (pro-active) rather than waiting until dogs are nose-to-nose. If your dog is familiar with another dog, or their energy level and size seems a good match, then slowly - on loose lead, allow them a sniff or two. Better still, in a safe area, unleash them. Then “our” emotions don’t turn into annoying marketing calls, interrupting their meet/greet. You will know within seconds whether this will snowball into atomic warfare IF the dogs have good calming signals (body language detectives). Step in CALMLY and reclaim your dog with a hand under the collar or hook on the leash.

Past associations with dogs or people who have scared them will cause fear in the future. Dogs live in the moment but they do not forget associations when bad things happen. It may seem silly to us, but if a dog was scared by another dog on a walk, it is generalized to them. They may notice a similar breed, environment and this can trigger familiar anxiety or fear.

Integrate Training into Daily Living and Learning

Using ***Doggy Diner, Mine, Yours, Ours, Object Exchange*** and all the other learning techniques in ACT, you can easily integrate training, socialization and manners into daily living with dogs. ***Feeding our dogs 2X a day gives us 14 training opportunities a week to ask for “Watch-Me, Sit, Down, Stay, Wait, Easy.”***

Creating a schedule walking your dog even for 10 minutes in a different area/route a couple of times a week will increase their tolerability for walks in more active areas. Psychology 101 teaches that with fears or phobias begin a program slowly and incrementally, integrating systematic desensitization (SD) and counter-conditioning (CC).

SD is introducing dog or human to a fear or phobia (spiders – big dogs – little dogs – men with beards) from afar. This may take walking weeks - 20 or more feet away. If your dog gets excited or fearful, redirect to a safer, calmer distance, having them “Sit and Watch YOU”.

CC is pairing something scary or nasty with something positive. Rather than bop a dog or repeatedly tug on the lead (which seldom works), redirect and have them sit, while giving them a healthy treat.

If you have a treat phobia, then what is your dog’s life rewards? Bring their favorite Frisbee, ball or treat. This is empowering you as the bearer of good things. Focus on when the dog is calm around dogs and children. When their association with what is novel, titillating or scary becomes paired with being CALM FIRST, then getting a treat - WOW – the light goes on! ***Enjoy the journey living and leaning with dogs!***