

Are You Rewarding Undesirable Behaviors?

Chances are, the answer to this question is yes...but probably not intentionally. The reality is that dogs will repeat any behavior that gets them attention – **any attention**.

First, let's look at what constitutes "attention"? Attention is petting your dog, talking to your dog, looking at your dog, chasing your dog, scolding your dog...and so on and so forth. Notice, I did not say dogs will repeat any behavior that gets them positive attention, I said dogs will repeat any behavior that gets them any attention.

Take for example, Angel the dog running around the house like a maniac, carrying Dad's best gym socks in her mouth. Dad, in turn, runs around the house chasing after her – half laughing, half scolding. Then, tired from her great game of chase, Angel lies down nicely on her bed. Dad, frustrated at the demise of those gym socks, ignores Angel and starts telling his wife how mischievous their pet is.

Based on this scenario, what behavior do you think will get repeated? You guessed it – running around like a maniac with Dad's sock, because that's the behavior that got attention. Lying down nicely on the bed got Angel ignored. If a dog has a choice between a behavior that gets ignored and a behavior that gets negative attention, she will choose the behavior that gets negative attention.

Here's the good news: dogs prefer (and respond more favorably to) positive attention. In the case of Angel running around with the gym socks – behavior like this can be hard to ignore. But, you can offer minimal attention to this kind of mischief and reward desired behaviors when they happen (i.e. saying "Good girl!" if Angel drops the socks or lays nicely in her bed).

So be mindful of what behaviors you give attention (any attention!) to and you'll probably start to notice changes in your dog's actions.