

Golden Retriever Rescue of Wisconsin, Inc.

Submissive Urination**GRRoW Hotline: 888-655-4753**

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Submissive or excitement urination is a problem that many Golden Retriever owners have been faced with. These problems are both embarrassing for the pet owner as well as frustrating to deal with. The good news is that in most cases, these problems are easily treatable.

Before beginning a treatment plan for your dog, it is important to understand why your dog urinates in certain social situations. Excitement urination is as simple as it sounds. Your dog urinates upon becoming too excited and can no longer control his bladder. Dogs that are prone to submissive urination generally have a shy personality and will urinate upon greeting an owner or new person. While the problems themselves are different, the treatment is very similar. For the sake of simplicity, we will refer to submissive urination in this article.

Submissive urination is a natural and instinctual reaction of certain dogs to acknowledge that you are their superior. This reaction upon greeting you is generally accompanied by a low crouched position, ears back and they may scoot or crawl towards you. Many times, it is when you lean down to acknowledge them that they urinate. The most important thing to remember is that they urinate *unknowingly*. This is not a houstraining problem and should *never* be reprimanded.

The most common problem I see as a trainer is the vicious cycle that happens to many dogs who suffer from submissive urination. They cower and try their hardest to show their owner that they revere them as the all-knowing-supreme master. For this submission, many times they are yelled at, banished outside and in more extreme cases, hit and kicked. The problems with this "solution" that many frustrated owners revert to is that by reprimanding the dog you increase the dog's fear. In return, the increased fear causes the dog to submissively urinate even *more*.

To think of it in a dog's perspective is the easiest way to grasp the situation. My owner comes home and I am trying my hardest to show him that I respect him and value his authority. Every time I try, he yells at me and spansks me and sends me outside. He is angry with me when I come back inside. I am afraid of my owner coming home because every time he does, I get scolded. I must really show him how afraid I am next time he comes home.

Remember, that a dog has no idea that they are even urinating. It is a reflex that they have no control over. They think the punishment comes from greeting the owner. This punishment makes the dog more submissive and they will start to urinate in fear even more than when they started. This solution never works. Dogs that are punished for submissive urination become even more shy and in some cases aggressive.

So now you are asking, if punishment is not the answer to submissive urination, how should we deal with it? I have outlined some simple reconditioning steps that work for the majority of dogs with submissive urination problems.

1. Rule Out Medical Problems

Golden Retrievers are prone to bladder infections. Symptoms of bladder infections range from urinating frequent small amounts, lack of bladder control, licking of the groin, drinking more, and bloody urine in more severe cases. Before treating a dog for submissive urination, it is very important to *always* have a urine examination performed at your veterinary clinic to rule-out a painful urinary tract infection or other problems.

2. Identify All Triggers

The next step in treating the problem is listing *all* triggers that cause your dog to submissively urinate. For example, he urinates when I: reach for him, talk in a high pitched voice, touch him, when a stranger visits or when I take off my coat. The number and types of triggers vary from Golden to Golden. Be very specific in your triggers instead of grouping them together by noting “when I come home”.

3. Remove All Triggers

The next step in correcting this problem is to remove all triggers that cause the dog to urinate. For example, if every time you come home and speak in a high-pitched voice your dog urinates, you will come home and not speak to the dog at all. If your dog urinates when you reach down to pet him, you will learn to ignore the dog until he is calm, squat down and allow the dog approach you. Practice until you find ways around your dogs triggers so that there is no urination involved.

4. Begin Obedience Training

All dogs should have the basic obedience commands of Sit, Stay, Down and Come. By practicing these commands with your dog you will develop a bond and show your dog a new way to show his obedience and loyalty. These commands will also come in handy when your dog is greeting new people as well. Rather than allowing your dog to slink towards your company and begin submissively urinating, you will command the dog to sit and stay while you greet your company. Only when the dog is calm and relaxed will you release him and allow him to calmly say hello to your friends.

5. Reward Correct Responses

In training any animal, be it person, cat, horse or dog, the most important thing to keep in mind is this: **All behavior that is rewarded will be repeated.** This goes for good *or* bad behavior. If your dog receives a pleasant response to a behavior there is a good chance that he will repeat that behavior in hopes of getting his reward again. For instance, if your dog jumps up on you and you pet his head and say hello, chances are your dog will jump up again and again trying to solicit your petting and attention.

Find a reward your dog enjoys. Pieces of soft treats (the size of a pea) are a great and easy way to reward your dog. Clicker training is an easy training method for both dogs and owners. It allows you to communicate your approval to your dog along with the treats in a very timely fashion. For more information on getting started with clicker training, you can visit the site www.clickertraining.com or pick up a book at your local pet store. This method of training works particularly well on shy dogs.

After we have identified all triggers and stopped using them, we can start to slowly recondition our dogs to accept the triggers while giving us a different and positive response. If your dog would cower and urinate when you reached for his head, what we will do is start by reaching our hand out, but not towards the dog. If there is no reaction we can reward with a “click” (if you are clicker training) or a “Good boy” and instantly give him the snack (you may drop the snack at his feet if he urinates when you reach to give it to him). When you have repeated this enough times that you can reach your hand out with no response from the dog, begin reaching out and down half way to the dog. Again, if there is no response, click and treat. If your dog cowers or urinates, back up to the following exercise and go slower. Do not treat or reprimand the incorrect behavior. Ignore the incorrect behavior and back track to the previous exercise. You have moved to fast for the dog’s comfort level. The goal is to have no reaction from the dog. You want him to feel calm and comfortable.

Set your dog up to succeed. You want to take baby steps in hopes that you will never elicit that same reaction again. Use these techniques for all triggers and you should eventually have a dog that you can come home and greet any which way you choose without having to clean up a mess in your front hall. Remember that a submissively urinating dog needs confidence and trust and punishment will never work and will only exaggerate the problem.

For excitement urination, follow the same steps above. Again, the goal is to have a calm and comfortable dog being careful not to feed into his excitement. Reward the good behavior and ignore the bad. Remember, *never* punish or yell at your dog for submissive urination—stay calm—or you may damage the bond you hope to have with your canine companion. If you have tried all of these steps and still have not achieved the goals that you would like, then contact a behavior consultant to visit your home. Trained eyes can catch mistakes in a training program that may go unnoticed by an amateur trainer. When necessary, professional help is worth the investment in the bond between your family and Golden—not to mention saving the cost of replacing carpeting!

About Kate:

Kate Schoepke is the certified canine behaviorist at My Pet's Vet in Mequon, WI. She grew up surrounded by animals including dogs, cats, horses, rats, potbellied pigs and anything else she could convince her parents to let her keep. Her interest in training started at a young age when she began successfully training and competing horses. She took her horse training skills to the dogs and slowly began studying their behavior and training her own family pets. In 2002 Kate was out of college and working at a veterinary clinic. She decided to further her talent in animal behavior and attended the Animal Behavior College. She received her degree and graduated with high honors. Kate has been teaching obedience classes and private lessons ever since. She recently joined forces with Dr. Ron Beatty at My Pet's Vet in Mequon and continues to see private consultations in Ozaukee and Milwaukee counties.

