

Most of what we tend to label as “problem behaviour” is actually normal canine behaviour, and none of it is meant to spite or frustrate us. Dogs are simply being dogs. Dogs do what they do because they want food, play, attention, social time with other dogs, etc. Fortunately, you can use what your foster dog wants to train them to behave in ways you like. With patience and consistency, most problem behaviour can be changed for good.

**Why does my foster dog bark?**

Your foster dog may bark for a variety of reasons including:

- Excitement
- Barrier frustration
- Fear and anxiety
- Loneliness/boredom
- Attention-seeking

**Why does my foster dog bark at other people when we are out on a walk?**

Barking at people can mean several things. Your foster dog may be uncomfortable with strangers, or with a subset of people he hasn’t encountered often (e.g. people wearing hats, children on bikes).

Alternatively, your foster dog is simply excited to meet new people. Reward good behaviour (i.e. not barking). Contact the Foster Care Network Team on 03 9224 2565 (Monday to Friday 9am-5pm) who can put you in touch with our Behaviour Team for advice and assistance with your foster dog.

**Why does my foster dog bark at other dogs when we are out on a walk?**

This is a complex issue, and may be related to frustration, anxiety or fear around other dogs. Try to walk your foster dog at non-peak times.

Contact the Foster Care Network Team on 03 9224 2565 (Monday to Friday 9am-5pm) who can put you in touch with our Behaviour Team for advice and assistance with your foster dog.

**Why does my foster dog bark when he is home alone?**

The first suspect is loneliness or boredom. You can rule these out by boosting your foster dog’s exercise regimen and providing food puzzles when you’re away. Next, eliminate territoriality by restricting your foster dog to an area of the house where they can’t see people, dogs, or cars going by (try a different safe room if needed).

If your foster dog still barks incessantly while alone, they may have separation-related issues. Check your Foster Agreement Form for the behavioural plan to adhere to, or refer to **more information** at the end of these FAQs for a list of alternate resources available to assist you.

<p><b>Why does my foster dog chew things?</b></p>	<p>Some reasons dogs chew:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Because it feels good</li> <li>• Anxiety</li> <li>• Attention-seeking</li> <li>• Barrier frustration/escape behaviour</li> <li>• Pent-up energy</li> <li>• Hunger</li> </ul> <p>Tip: Always rule out hunger first. Ensure you're feeding your foster dog in accordance with the guidelines stated on the Foster Agreement Form.</p>
<p><b>Why does my foster dog chew up window frames and doorknobs?</b></p>	<p>This is escape behaviour that can spring from either barrier frustration (wanting to get outside in the world where all the fun is) or separation-related issues. In the first instance, increase your foster dog's exercise, provide more alone-time stimulation, and confine them to an area away from windows and doors.</p> <p>If the problem persists, please contact the Foster Care Network Team on 03 9224 2565 (Monday to Friday 9am-5pm) to make an appointment with one of our behaviourists.</p>
<p><b>When I watch TV, my foster dog fetches one of my favourite shoes and chews on it.</b></p>	<p>This is classic attention-seeking behaviour. Your foster dog needs more stimulation and more time with you. You should also move the shoes out of your foster dog's reach and redirect them to an appropriate dog toy.</p>
<p><b>Why does my foster dog jump?</b></p>	<p>Some of the reasons dogs jump include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greeting people/dogs</li> <li>• Attention-seeking</li> <li>• Play initiation</li> <li>• To explore/get something they want</li> </ul>
<p><b>My foster dog jumps up on people I meet or on guests in my home.</b></p>	<p>That's your foster dog saying hello the canine way. Ask your foster dog to say hello in a more polite way, for example by sitting or going to their bed when the doorbell rings. Alternatively, put your foster dog in another room when guests arrive.</p>

<p><b>When I sit quietly and read a book, my foster dog jumps on me.</b></p>	<p>Your foster dog wants attention, and probably has a surplus of energy. Direct your foster dog to play with their toys and find ways to increase their exercise and mind workouts. Don't take calm behaviour for granted either. Make a habit out of praising, petting, or tossing your foster dog a treat whenever they are lying around quietly.</p>
<p><b>My foster dog jumps on me with their favourite toy when I sit down.</b></p>	<p>That's play behaviour and attention-seeking rolled into one. Again, the answer is to redirect your foster dog to solitary play and make sure they get to exercise both their body and mind every day.</p>
<p><b>My foster dog jumps on the kitchen counter to get to the leftover dinner.</b></p>	<p>This is known as "counter surfing", and prevention is the best cure. Dogs are natural scavengers, so figuring out how to get to out-of-reach food is hard-wired behaviour. If your foster dog manages to get at last night's lamb stew just once, you may have an incurable counter surfer on your hands.</p> <p>Install doors in your kitchen or use a baby gate to keep your foster dog out of the kitchen when you can't be there to supervise. Please note that counter surfing deterrents rarely work. Counter surfers are usually clever problem-solving dogs who don't give up easily.</p>
<p><b>Why does my dog pull on their leash?</b></p>	<p>Dogs pull to get to great smells, other dogs, open spaces, excitement to be outside etc.</p>
<p><b>My foster dog pulls so hard on the leash, my shoulder is sore. What do I do?</b></p>	<p>Pulling is second nature to dogs (think sled dogs), so nice leash walking must be taught. Here's what you can do:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use a training harness and a longer leash. Training harnesses are more comfortable for your foster dog, as they won't pull at their neck, and it gives you more control. For dogs that 'really put their back into it', back-clipping harnesses can be counter-productive, as they encourage the dog to pull. In this case, a front-attaching harness would be more appropriate.</li> </ul> <p>Using a longer leash gives the foster dog a little more room to move. This means less pressure on the foster dog, and therefore less pulling. Remember, it's not essential that your foster dog walks at your heel, especially at first. Concentrate on basic leash manners first and allow them the freedom to sniff and enjoy their walks.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Train good leash manners. Take food out on walks with you, and periodically call your foster dog when the lead is loose; reward them for responding. This teaches recall and that responding to you and being near you is in their best interest. If you are finding that your foster dog pulls a lot, try standing absolutely still and wait for them to return to you, then treat them and move on.</li> </ul>

	<p>If you are really struggling, you may need assistance from one of our behaviourists. Please contact the Foster Care Network Team on 03 9224 2565 (Monday to Friday 9am-5pm) to make an appointment.</p>
<p><b>Why is my dog fearful in new environments?</b></p>	<p>Some dogs, especially those who have led sheltered lives, may be cautious of new surroundings and need time to adjust (often lots of time, by human standards). Remember that many things you take for granted may be completely foreign to your foster dog (e.g. metal stairways, flapping awnings, city buses, traffic etc).</p>
<p><b>My foster dog crouches low to the ground, stalls on walks, shakes, or cowers.</b></p>	<p>Avoid the worst triggers or most difficult areas. Try to keep your foster dog comfortable and relaxed by feeding them extra yummy treats or bringing their favourite toy. This way, you can gradually build positive associations with the new surroundings.</p> <p>Most importantly, give them time to adjust. It could take weeks or even months before your foster dog is completely at ease in their new neighbourhood. Go slowly and build up exposure to new experiences and places; if they show this fearful behaviour, you will need to dial it back to where they feel more comfortable.</p>
<p><b>Is using food to train my foster dog bribery?</b></p>	<p>All animals, including humans, work for reinforcement. A reward to us might be a promotion at work or a dinner out with friends. Dogs too will work only for reinforcement. Much as they enjoy our company, their purpose in life is to fulfil their own needs (e.g. food, shelter, security, social needs, etc).</p> <p>You can use food, play, praise, the prospect of a leash walk, or pats to reward your foster dog - different dogs have different motivations. If you manage to motivate them sufficiently, they will happily do what you ask.</p>
<p><b>If I start training with food, will I always have to use it?</b></p>	<p>Not all the time, no. To maintain an already established behaviour, you should use any reward your foster dog cares about and only break out the food intermittently; a jackpot prize to keep them playing the game. But, when you want to introduce a new behaviour into your foster dog's repertoire, food is a superior tool as it's portable, easy to deliver, and high on a dog's list of priorities.</p>
<p><b>When my foster dog pulls on leash, jumps on me, or shows aggression, do they want to dominate me?</b></p>	<p>The label of "dominance" has been used to explain every type of behaviour in dogs, from not coming when called to protectiveness of toys and food. But dogs don't constantly plot how to overthrow humans and gain sole custody of the fridge. If your foster dog jumps on you, they are probably excited to see you. If they pull on leash it's because they are in a hurry to go places. The idea of dominance sets up an unhelpful conflict. Better to focus on what you would like your foster dog to do instead of the behaviour you don't enjoy, and then teach them that by rewarding them for it.</p>

<p><b>Rubbing my foster dog's nose in their urine or faeces will stop them from soiling the house.</b></p>	<p>Absolutely not true. The only thing your foster dog will learn from this experience is to expect irrational and unpleasant behaviour from their humans. Just like newspaper swatting and scolding, it may even teach your foster dog not to go to the bathroom in front of you, which makes it harder to house-train them.</p>
<p><b>Stubborn dogs need assertive training and punishment.</b></p>	<p>It's true that some dogs learn faster than others, and some breeds are bred to stick to their guns (think Beagles with their noses on a scent!), but no dog is wilfully stubborn. If your foster dog doesn't respond to your training efforts, odds are you haven't provided enough (or the right) motivation or a timely reward.</p>
<p><b>My foster dog barks and growls at strangers on the street because they are protective of me.</b></p>	<p>Alas, the naked truth is that your foster dog is protective of themselves. The furious display of bravado is their way of showing they are uncomfortable with or afraid of strangers. Some dogs are genetically predisposed to be more suspicious of unknown people, but generally this fear is due to lack of socialisation, or negative experiences in early life.</p>
<p><b>My foster dog destroys things in my home or urinates on the floor out of spite. I can tell because they look so guilty.</b></p>	<p>When you return home to find shredded bed linens or a puddle in the living room, it's easy to think your foster dog did those things because they are angry with you for some reason. But guilt is a wholly human concept. The "guilty look" on your foster dog's face doesn't mean they feel bad for what they did, they have forgotten all about that by now, it simply means that they are reading subtle cues in your body language telling them you are not happy.</p> <p>If it happens frequently, they have just learned to be fearful of you since bad things always happen when you arrive home. Their toileting behaviour might spring from boredom, loneliness, a surplus of energy, anxiety, or simply having to hold it too long.</p>

**More information**

Refer to your Foster Agreement Form for more information on how to manage your foster dog's specific behavioural needs.

Please contact the Foster Care Network Team on 03 9224 2565 (Monday to Friday 9am-5pm) should you need further assistance with your foster animal.

More information on dog behaviour is also available in our [Dog Behaviour & Training Handbook](#) and on our website [www.rspcavic.org/health-and-behaviour](http://www.rspcavic.org/health-and-behaviour).