



PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

## Canine Master on Pet Life Radio - Episode #23 Mastering Dog Urine Marking Behavior

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**Chris Onthank:**

Hey, welcome to the Canine Master Radio Show on Pet Life Radio. I'm your host, Chris Onthank. And I'm joined today by our Director of Training at Dog Gone Smart, Jaimee Kelsey. Hi, Jaimee.

**Jaimee Kelsey:**

Hi, Chris. Thanks for having me.

**Chris Onthank:**

Yeah, so I just think it'd be really great that you're on the show today, because we both run into so many times a very common problem that we see mostly with male dogs, but we see it with females as well. And that is urine marking. Where your dog comes up and lifts its leg in your house, which is a real big, big problem. Urine marking is very different than just general housebreaking. So we're going to want to talk about how urine marking happens, why it happens. And then we're also going to want to get into how to fix it. So we're going to get started on this very common behavioral issue right after a few words from our sponsors.

**Chris Onthank:**

Hey, welcome back. It's canine master, Chris Onthank and Jaimee Kelsey from Dog Gone Smart.

**Jaimee Kelsey:**

Hello.

**Chris Onthank:**

Hey. And we're back. We're going to talk about urine marking.

**Jaimee Kelsey:**

Yeah. Chris, you were saying before about males and females. And as the Director here at Dog Gone Smart, I am on the phone all day fielding questions from clients. And one question I get a lot is, "Jaimee, we're thinking of getting a puppy. But can you recommend what you think is better, a male or a female?" And this is one of the huge concerns about getting a male dog is the notion that they are more likely to mark the territory. And how true is that, that it's more likely with males than females?

**Chris Onthank:**

Well, it is, Jaimee. It is more likely that a male will lift his leg. We do see females, especially more dominant females doing marking. I think we need to talk a little bit about why dogs mark in the first place. Dogs mark in the first place, because they are claiming a territory. There's a feeling that they have to sort of mark the perimeters. You'll see this with whether coyotes, wild dogs or even wolves. They'll actually mark their territories both with urine and feces. They'll do both. But they'll go and they'll go out to the farthest sort of points of their territory, and they'll lift their legs on trees and mark them. And then what they do is another one will come across and try to be a little bit higher, and a little bit higher. So, males tend to want to lift their legs so that they can get as high up as they can. So, what happens is, is that males will do that inside their house when they get a little agitated sometimes, or maybe they have a little bit of anxiety.

**Jaimee Kelsey:**

What age does that typically start for the male dogs?

**Chris Onthank:**

It typically ends ... When you start to see your males starting to lift their legs, it's usually six, seven months is when we start seeing males lift their legs. And then a lot of people would go, "Well, what if we get our dogs fixed? How does this help?" So, "If we neuter our dogs, our males, does this cut it down?" Have you run into that, Jaimee? I'm sure, I run into it all the time.

**Jaimee Kelsey:**

Oh, absolutely. Neutering is a larger question as far as it's a component of socialization. But they say, "I don't want marking, Jaimee. What age should I neuter my male? I really want to prevent the marking." Also, if their dog has started marking prior to six months, around five months, "Will the neutering stop it?" And is that true if they start marking before, will the neutering stop it?

**Chris Onthank:**

Yeah. So I have found neutering is a bigger issue, because we get into growth plates. And there's this ... We should do a whole show just on neutering, Jaimee.

**Jaimee Kelsey:**

Yeah.

**Chris Onthank:**

The thing is, is that a lot of veterinarians are now telling you to wait to neuter until the growth plates have grown in. And with large dogs, that could be 18 months, two years. And with your larger giant breeds, that could be three years. So, years ago, we would say neuter the dog before he starts lifting his leg. But now veterinarians around the country and around the world are saying, "No, don't do this. It can cause health issues." And there's a whole host of health reasons why not to neuter your dog at that seven-month point. And personally, I tend to agree with that. But then of course, we also like to get our dogs into daycare and boarding facilities where there's free play. And after seven months, your dog's much more likely to be attacked. So

neutering can help a dog that is marking for territorial reasons. But I even see dogs that are neutered, continue to mark.

**Jaimee Kelsey:**

Continue to do it. I do think having a show on neutering would be a great idea. Many dog owners, they get advice from their breeders. They get advice from their vet, health advice. Like you said, what you agree with. But when they come to us, they're looking for behavioral advice. And so the behavioral advice may be a little bit different with the vet's recommendation. Like you said, talking about socialization and marking where neutering can help affect behavior. But it may not be recommended for certain health reasons.

**Chris Onthank:**

Yeah. I mean, so it really is a tough call. And that's actually something I would discuss with your veterinarian, and find out what their position is on. So it's a real tough one. But basically, if we have a dog that is marking, he's generally marking because he thinks he owns the territory. And when I was growing up, I had a dachshund named Magic. Magic was a wired-hair dachshund that I fell in love with when I lived above the kennel house. I was in the kennel house above the kennel. And there was this dachshund I fell in love with as a small child.

And it's a really, quite a bit sad story is that Magic was living in my house. He'd sleep underneath my arm. I loved this dog more than any dog I think I've ever owned in my life. My first childhood dog. And Magic would get agitated. He'd hear somebody outside, he'd bark. And then he would go and lift his leg. We see a lot of dogs doing this when it might be the mailman who's at the door, or he's coming to the mailbox. He barks and the mailman goes away. And the dog will then triumphantly sort of go around the outskirts of the room and lift his leg on the couch, or the dining room table. My dog, Magic did this all the time. And my mother and father had bought a new home when Magic was probably around eight years old. And they said, "Chris, we can't have Magic come to our new home and destroy the home." I mean, how many dogs are we seeing ending up in shelters because they mark, and the people don't know what to do?

So unfortunately my mother ... And listen, this is changing times folks. I mean, we probably wouldn't do this now. And I hope we wouldn't, because we have ways of fixing it. But my mother actually put Magic to sleep, euthanized him. And I was crushed. I mean, it literally was one of the most profound experiences of my life when I lost my best friend, my dog, Magic. And my mother did this, and don't look down on mother, of course. I mean, my mother was doing what the veterinarian said. Said, "We can't stop this." But we know so much more now. And we're going to show you a few ways that we can fix this. But thousands and thousands of dogs are either euthanized or end up in shelters because they mark the house, and people don't know what to do.

**Jaimee Kelsey:**

I think that many people confuse marking with housebreaking. "I just simply can't house train my dog." And so how do you tell the difference if it just needs more potty training structure, or if this is really marking?

**Chris Onthank:**

Well, that's a good question, Jaimee. A lot of people ask me that question. Housebreaking is ... I look at housebreaking as, "Oh my God, I need to go to the bathroom and I'm not going to hold it." Or, "I don't even care to hold it." So that is different than a dog marking. Marking comes from a feeling. And there's other types of sort of problems that we see with dogs urinating. Even submissive peeing, which we see a person bends over their dog and they piddle a little bit. That's also a feeling of submission. They don't even know they're doing it. But with marking, it's a feeling of triumphant sort of ownership. And it usually occurs when the dog either is anxious, they're nervous. Or in many cases, it's when the mailman or the dog ... Or they hear, they get agitated. And then they get insecure. And then they mark their territory by lifting their legs.

**Jaimee Kelsey:**

Chris, I think it's a good time for us to take a quick break for our sponsors. If we can come right back and continue the conversation.

**Chris Onthank:**

Hey, welcome back to Canine Master with my guest, Jaimee Kelsey from Dog Gone Smart. Let's talk about this marking again. And how do we fix a dog from marking? A lot of people, Jaimee, will use things called the Belly Band. It's a band that goes over the male dog's penis. And when they pee, it absorbs like a diaper. And the problem ... There's no problem. But one of the issues is, you're not fixing the male marking. You're just managing it and keeping your house more sanitary.

**Jaimee Kelsey:**

With any behavior that we want to fix, we have to get to the cause of the behavior in order to modify it, not just put a band-aid on it, and treat the symptom. Because that just treats the symptom, but it doesn't get to the cause of the marking.

**Chris Onthank:**

Exactly. And so again, the cause of male marking is where the dog feels like he owns the territory. And in this case, that's probably your house.

**Jaimee Kelsey:**

So what can owners do to fix this?

**Chris Onthank:**

Well, we really need to take the territory back. It's your territory. And we need to make the dog less dominant in the space, and more submissive in the space. What does that mean?

**Jaimee Kelsey:**

Yeah, how do we do that?

**Chris Onthank:**

All right. Well, the first thing is, is that ... And we've talked about this in other behavioral issues, but it does follow suit. This can be fixed, you guys. And I'm going to show you right now. You need to first start winning your elevated areas. So a lot of times the dog will be sitting on the couch or the top of the couch, looking over his territory outside. And here comes the neighborhood dog and they bark, bark, bark, bark, bark, and get all worked up.

And then the guy with his dog walks past the property, and then they jump off the couch and quickly go and lift their leg. That's really a common scenario that I just described. So we want to win the elevated areas. And winning is very different than managing them from staying on the elevated areas. So staying on the elevated areas or blocking them from being on the elevated area. So if I stick a chair and block them, that's not winning. I have to go actually up to the dog and get kind of angry, "Uh-uh (negative)." Give him a guttural tone, and pull them off. "Get off that couch." And win the elevated area. So we're teaching the dog that the elevated areas in the household, the top of the stairs, stair landings, couches, beds, chairs are yours.

**Jaimee Kelsey:**

I think it's important to define what an elevated or a dominant area it is. It may not just be the sofa. But so many times clients see this behavior, their dog has a lookout, a bay window. Or it's at the greeting area in the foyer of the house. So winning those elevated and dominant spaces is really important.

**Chris Onthank:**

That's exactly right. Even winning the doorway entrances, sort of going up, take your foot and nudge them out of the doorways or the entrances. If your dog is roosting or looking out over his territory, this in the marking scenario is what is a big factor. So I'm going to go and win those elevated areas. I'm going to take the dog off. I'm going to tell him, I'm going to let them know that getting up on the couch is not okay. Now for some of you, it might be fine for you to invite them up on invitation only. But in the very beginning, I'd say when we're trying to correct this marking, I would eliminate all elevated areas and doorways for a while. At least three to four weeks until the marking behavior goes away. If you see that the marking behavior comes back when you start inviting the dog back up at elevated areas, then maybe being on elevated areas is something that we should never allow.

**Jaimee Kelsey:**

I think it's important too, you really have to have a 100% consistency. It's not, "Well, most of the time I don't let him on the sofa." In order to change the behavior, you really need to be consistent. And inviting them is kind of a ... It's a loophole when you start to see improvement, if you need to snuggle with them up on the sofa, you can invite them. But it really needs to be a 100% consistency, no elevated spaces in order to change and modify the behavior.

**Chris Onthank:**

Yeah. I mean, consistency is huge when we're getting rid of a dog that's marking. Because if they see any windows of opportunity, they're going to say, "Oh, wait. Maybe I'm not in charge of this territory anymore." So let's talk about the next thing that we really need to do as far as marking. And this is a huge one. You need to move the dog often. You need to be dominant in the space.

So when I say, "Move," you're going to walk through your dog nonchalantly. Nothing's mean here. But you're literally going to walk through your dog, using your feet, nudge them out of the way. If they get out of your way as you approach walking through them, that's fine too. Your dog should be actually submissive to you in the space. So that means that when you start walking towards them, they get out of the way.

And if they don't get out of the way, you gently nudge them out of the way. If they're lying in the middle of the floor, go ahead and take your foot and nudge them out of the way. Don't use a verbal command. This is more instinctual based training here, folks. So you're going to put a little bit of body pressure, lean a little forward, take your foot if you have to, and nudge them out of the way.

I tell people with dogs that are marking, to move their dogs at least 20 times a day. Now you can say, "Oh my God, that's cruel." It's not cruel. You can move your dog five times in 10 seconds. So it's not a big thing. You never hurt your dog in this situation. You're not doing anything mean. You're just owning the space by being dominant in the space. This is the feeling that we want them to realize that they no longer are in charge of. That they are actually more submissive in this space. You'll start to see that it's working, Jaimee, when they start lying in corners out of the way, when they start lying underneath the table. Now they're no longer being dominant in this space. And this is when the marking will actually start going away.

**Jaimee Kelsey:**

Chris, this brings to mind, I had a client tell me that any time her brother would visit, her golden retriever would pee on him. And that was the only time he was marking when her brother would come to visit in the house. And I wonder if this is related to owning the space, moving the dog. How would you address that situation when it's specific to a person?

**Chris Onthank:**

Well, it's interesting, Jaimee, I mostly see the dogs mark their people. I was recently on a beach with a bunch of dogs. And this lady was talking with me, and her dog in the middle of talking to me, ran around the beach and came back and peed on her. Well, what the dog was doing was marking her owner. Now marking the brother, yes, that may be true. I don't know, but maybe he has a good relationship with the brother. I don't know. But most of that sort of peeing on the people I have seen it's when they're peeing on their human companion.

**Jaimee Kelsey:**

Okay.

**Chris Onthank:**

And it's the wrong kind of relationship.

**Jaimee Kelsey:**

Could it ever be a sign of anxiety?

**Chris Onthank:**

Yeah. Well, we do see that. We see dogs will mark when they're anxious. And their role is one of, "Hey, I'm in charge, but I'm kind of scared." Those kinds of dogs, those nervous dogs that also have ... That think they're in charge of the territory are sometimes your biggest markers.

**Jaimee Kelsey:**

Okay.

**Chris Onthank:**

So those are the kind of dogs-

**Jaimee Kelsey:**

Interesting.

**Chris Onthank:**

... we want to actually really win the elevated areas, move them a lot, never walk around them or step over them, walk through them. Those are the kinds of dogs that we want to really become more dominant in space with. Because actually they'll relax more. They'll relax more. They'll become much calmer. And you'll see that they'll actually be happier in the end.

**Jaimee Kelsey:**

Okay. So we're moving them 20 times a day, getting them off elevated spaces. What else should we be doing?

**Chris Onthank:**

Well, the other thing is just sort of about the relationship. If your dog is barking at you to be pet and nudging you, these are things that you want to do. You want to sort of start your interactions and end your interactions. But the two largest or the two biggest components of marking is elevation and being dominant in the space. A lot of people ask me, "Well, what do I do about ... My dog's been marking on this couch and the urine odor is there." The urine odor is there. And if you don't get rid of that urine odor, Jaimee, they're going to keep on peeing and marking that same exact spot. So you'll see that dogs typically mark the same area or the same corner of the couch, or the dining room table, or the dresser. So what you want to do is you got to get rid of this urine odor.

So if you have a carpet where they mark the corner of the carpet, go get that professionally cleaned. If it's a wall-to-wall carpet and the urine is in the backing, the dogs are going to continue to go back there and pee. So you need to neutralize that odor. And the way to neutralize it, I've used products like Nature's Miracle or Urine Off. Yeah, these are great cleaners. You got to blot up that urine. And then if it's on a carpet or something, you want to clean that. And then you have to neutralize it so the dog doesn't continue to smell it over and over again.

**Jaimee Kelsey:**

And you see this a lot if families move to a new home. And there's some marking, it's usually indicative that there is a pet urine odor there from the previous family. And so that's challenging as well to make sure that you sterilize the space to discourage future marking.

**Chris Onthank:**

Right. No, it's definitely ... So you have to get rid of that urine odor first though, before you start this. Because if you don't, it's just not going to work, because the dog's smelling that urine. So I can wipe down the hard surfaces easily. It's actually ... It's the upholstery. So you may have to get a professional upholstery cleaner in there.

**Jaimee Kelsey:**

So Chris, what do you do when you catch them? I mean, some people might feel punishing them is going to address it. But if it's about their feeling and their emotion, what should you do when you catch the marking in the house?

**Chris Onthank:**

Well, the thing is you want the dog during this transition of, he's free to mark everywhere, or he's been wearing a Belly Band, then he just keeps on peeing, but we don't see it. One of the things that you want to do is, you have to catch them in the act or when they're just about to start. So if you correct them after they've done it, it's never going to work. Because by the time they've peed and now they've walked away and you correct them, they have no idea it was the act of lifting their legs that you're upset about. So when they're thinking about it, is the best time. So if you can see your dog's getting agitated, and he's starting to walk over to the corner of that desk that he always pees on. Now's the time to give a correction.

So we need to get a marker, a marker word that says that a primary punisher is coming. So what would that be? We could use a word like, "That's it," or whatever. It just has to be a word that means that a squirt water bottle is coming, and we're going to squirt them all over top of the head. Sometimes I will take a hand towel, I'll roll it up, what we call a bonker. And I might, if I see him about to pee ... Now this isn't going to hurt him. It's like a pillow. If I see them about to pee, I'll say, "That's it." And then I'll throw towards them a rolled up towel, a hand towel, small. It doesn't have to be anything big.

Something that's going to startle them to interrupt that process. So what we want to do is we sort of want the dog to know that it's the act of peeing. So catching them in the act, when they're in the midst of it, that's when we use what we call a marker word that is always followed by this punisher. That's really important. And that does work.

**Jaimee Kelsey:**

That really is only effective if you're doing your consistent leadership exercises.

**Chris Onthank:**

Oh, yeah. You can't depend on that as the way to stop them. And the other thing is, is that a lot of times marking occurs when you're not home, when the dog feels more empowered. So what I also will do is I will limit the places that my dog can go. I might even go back to using a crate for a while-



**Jaimee Kelsey:**

When you're not home.

**Chris Onthank:**

... or a small room. Yeah. When I'm not home. Getting them in an area where they can't do this situation. The worst is, the dog doesn't mark in front of you, but he marks when you're not home, because he's either anxious or he's more territorial when you're not in the house. So again, you need to be consistent for several weeks to break this habit.

**Jaimee Kelsey:**

All right, Chris. Why don't we take another quick break? And then we can come back to the conversation.

**Chris Onthank:**

Welcome back to Canine Master on Pet Life Radio. Jaimee, I know that you've gotten a few questions from our listeners. Can you share those with us? I mean maybe we can help some people out.

**Jaimee Kelsey:**

Sure. Let me go through some here that we may not have already covered. All right. This one says, "My Aussie puppy is nine months. And before we used to go out and he would take a very long pee. Now all he does is mark many places with very little urine, and is constantly lifting his leg on everything along our walk. Is this normal? Please help."

**Chris Onthank:**

That's a great question. Dogs are marking along the way. So you're out on the walk. And I bet you this dog is not in a sort of travel position of walking behind you, which I really promote. But it's probably walking out in front of you. He's directing the walk. So he's in charge of where you're going in his mind. These are the kinds of dogs that are going to mark the most. They're going to mark. They're going to mark. They're going to mark. They're going to mark. I mean, I try with my own dog, my dog Dave, who he could be a marker when we go outside. But what I do with Dave is, is that I make him sort of walk with me or a little bit behind me. And then he doesn't mark. I don't let him mark until I let him get to a spot or then he'll have some free time.

So I have a sort of a beginning and an end. At Dog Gone Smart, we call this travel position of walking behind us called, let's walk. Heel is walking next to me. That's another travel position that we teach in our classes. But when they're in these positions of travel, I don't let them mark. I enforce that position. And then I may come to a place where I want them to sniff and just be dogs, and let them be. And then I let them mark and be what they want to be. So maybe having a beginning and an end to a travel position, whether that's walking slightly behind you, or is that walking next to you. And then saying, "Okay," or, "Free dog," like we used to say. And now the dog's free to sniff and pee where he wants to. So having a beginning and an end is a real important thing.

**Jaimee Kelsey:**

Wonderful. I have a question though. What about adding treats in the area of the marking? If you feed ... They're marking on a certain spot in the house, if you feed them in that spot, does that have any effect?

**Chris Onthank:**

I have not heard that technique. Is that something you've heard, Jaimee?

**Jaimee Kelsey:**

Well, I've heard when housebreaking, sometimes it's recommended to feed in the area where they may be having an accident, because dogs don't like to urinate where they're eating and their immediate den. So I didn't know if that also applied to marking.

**Chris Onthank:**

Well, so that's a little bit different. So dogs don't want to go to the bathroom where they think their den is. And so where they eat typically with dogs anyway, not with other canines. But with dogs where they're eating, they're typically not going to do the number two and defecate.

**Jaimee Kelsey:**

Okay.

**Chris Onthank:**

They may pee in those areas, but they're not going to defecate. So that's where we'll see that. And they'll typically won't want to pee in that area, but they may mark in that area. So I don't think ... Marking is a little bit different than when we're establishing a den. Because marking happens because it is their territory or den.

**Jaimee Kelsey:**

Got it. Okay. All right. Another question from a client. "I have a two year old male boxer who we neutered six months ago." So at a year and a half. "He'd been doing some indoor marking, which drove us crazy. But we've made great improvement with some leadership and anxiety protocols. Here's my question. We are moving and we want to know what we can do to set him up for success in the new place, so these old behaviors don't come back of marking."

**Chris Onthank:**

So yeah. I mean, so immediately you're going into a new place. What you want to make sure you do is you change how that dog views that new territory. So even going into the territory, make sure they sort of acquiesce and let you go first. Going first up and down the stairs in the new territory. Moving them, like I said, about 20 times a day. It's actually a great opportunity of setting the new tone. So sometimes we find that fixing dogs that are marking, there's no urine remnants left over. And it's sort of like a fresh start. So that can be a great advantage to stopping that kind of marking.

**Jaimee Kelsey:**

Yeah, like a clean slate. Sometimes I tell clients, "Okay, in a new space, take your dog around the perimeter on leash. Do some leadership exercises, do some sits and downs. Establish that you give the direction in this new space so that the dog understands there's boundaries right from the jump."

**Chris Onthank:**

Exactly. So I mean, so Jaimee, I think we've covered it today. A lot of great-

**Jaimee Kelsey:**

Yeah.

**Chris Onthank:**

A lot of great things on marking. I mean, so that's our advice. You got to try these techniques. They will work, of course as long as you're consistent.

**Jaimee Kelsey:**

Yes.

**Chris Onthank:**

Yeah. And you'll find that they'll actually start to disappear. Make sure you get rid of that urine odor. Otherwise you're just going to sabotage your training. And I think that, Jaimee, I really, really enjoyed having you on the show. And hopefully we get you back soon.

Yeah. That'd be great. We have so many topics we could talk about. It's endless.

That's great, Jaimee. All right. Well, that's it for today. I really hope you found the show interesting. I'd like to know your comments and have you join our conversation. You can always email me at [chris@caninemaster.com](mailto:chris@caninemaster.com). That's C-A-N-I-N-E master.com. You can leave your questions for me, and I'll do my best to get back to you. Or you can even give me a call into our next show with your questions. Send me your videos and your photos so I can see what's going on with your dog, and help you fix your problem. Okay. That's bye for now. Thanks, Jaimee .

All right. Thanks, Chris. As always great, advice.

All right. See you next time on Canine Master on Pet Life Radio where I will continue to help you master the relationship with your dog. Bye for now.