

The Wee-Wee of Joy or Submissive Urination and What to do About It

By Charlotte Mielziner

In the Mielziner home, we use the term The Wee-Wee of Joy (as named in a Dave Barry article) to refer to what is really Submissive Urination. The little squirt of urine from a dog is actually an offer of appeasement. The dog is trying to communicate that yes, you are definitely higher in the pack order and please don't hurt him/her during the encounter. You may notice that it most often happens during greetings, when the dog approaches, tail wagging furiously and then suddenly, your shoes feel wet.

Submissive Urination is one of the top ten most common behavior problems reported to consultants and is often the reason dogs are surrendered to shelters and rescue groups. We know temperament is inherited and while some dogs never let loose at all, it is almost a given in some breeds, such as Old English Sheepdogs. We know it usually decreases on it's own by age two, but if not, help can still be sought and a good outcome is possible.

What to do about The Wee-Wee of Joy? First, NEVER punish it. The dog has no control over this behavior and punishment, or even just making a big deal by yelling, "Eeewww, that's gross!" just makes it worse. Remember, the dog is programmed by nature to communicate like a dog not a human.

Often owners are very frustrated by this behavior and by the time they have reported it to a consultant or obedience trainer, great damage has been done to the human-animal bond. The dog has no confidence that the owner can be appeased by what he/she offers. The owner must understand that punishment of any kind is counterproductive.

Let's provide a reasonable alternative by bringing the dog outside for greetings, if possible. If not, ignore the dog and enter the home quietly, keep your body language neutral and snap on a lead to take the little squirter out. Better yet, keep a short lead in your purse and snap it on at the door. Wait until the bladder is empty to do the Mommy's Home routine. Quietly go about cleaning up accidents without the loud complaints that the dog will only interpret as more reason to appease you.

Obedience training is highly recommended, but make absolutely sure positive motivation techniques are utilized. Aversive techniques will only make the situation worse. Trained dogs are generally more confident in human interactions and less likely to see appeasement as necessary. Exposing the dog to many new places and people will also help him relax. Again, make sure that these are positive experiences.

Instilling an alternate behavior can also help. Behaviorists call this technique Response Substitution. Train a trick such as spin or wave and use it when the dog is beginning to look like The Wee-Wee of Joy is about to occur. Keep it light and happy, but low key.

Good luck and may you need fewer and fewer paper towels for The Wee-Wee of Joy.