

Ask Cheryl

Animal behavior tips

This week:
Dog Can't Hold Her Licker



Q: My dog licks everything. When we sit on the couch, she tries to lick our face. We tell her no, push her away, and send her off the couch, but she still insists on licking. If we stop her from licking our face, she'll lick our arms, hands, or even legs. If we make her stop that, she'll start licking herself. She seems happy when she's licking us, but it's annoying. How do we stop her from all this licking?

A: Some people enjoy an occasional lick from their dogs. They view it as a loving kiss. Others find dog tongues the most disgusting thing on earth. After all we've seen where they lick and some of the gross things they eat! I personally like a "kiss" now and then from my dogs. Yes, as a behaviorist, I know it's not really a kiss, but I do occasionally like to forget all my training and go with the idea that my dog is giving me kisses out of love. I do not, however, appreciate a bath, so my dogs learn how to hold their licker.

Dogs lick for a number of reasons. Puppies lick their mother's face to get her to regurgitate food for them. Licking mom's face means getting a meal. Some theorize that this is what is happening when a dog licks a human's face - it's a reaction held over from their more youthful days. Mother dogs lick their puppies to stimulate urination and defecation. Licking also calms the puppies down by lowering the heart rate. Many dogs will lick their lips when they are nervous to help calm themselves and their environment. Dogs lower in the pack hierarchy will lick the face of the alpha dog to show submission. Sometimes you will find a dominant dog who licks another's face as a challenge. Kind of like the bully on the playground pushing a kid and saying, "Whatcha gonna do about it?" Fortunately, this is rare as these dogs usually have other behavior problems to go with their bullying.

Most licking occurs because it has gotten the dog some kind of reward. Dogs who lick their humans often have seen a benefit to it. Whether you are laughing, running away (chase is a fun game), pushing, or yelling at the dog, you are giving the dog attention. Attention is rewarding even if to us it seems like it should be a punishment (as in the case of pushing or yelling at the dog). The best way to stop a dog from licking is to ignore the licking. Stand up so the dog can't reach your face, turn your body away from the dog, or walk calmly into another room. During all this you say nothing to the dog and make no eye contact. All movements are slow and calm.

As soon as the dog stops attempting to lick you reward the dog for no licking with a treat or your attention depending on what has more value to the dog. Repeat this every time the dog licks - ignore the licking, reward no licking.

Some dogs develop a licking habit, especially in the case where the dog is licking themselves. Sometimes it started with an allergy or an injury. The dog licked the area, and now that the injury is gone, the dog continues to lick the area out of habit. With dogs like this it is usually necessary to redirect the dog calmly to another item - a bone or stuffed Kong so the dog can still lick. Eventually, if you are consistent with redirecting the dog, the habit will transfer to a more appropriate item. In really chronic cases where the dog is self-mutilating while licking it may be necessary to discuss calming medications with your vet while behavior modification protocols are followed. Always keep in mind that there is no magical pill that will stop an animal's behavior. Medication and behavior modification should be used at the same time with the goal of hopefully weaning the dog from the medication once new habits are formed.

If you have a dog who can't hold her licker, evaluate how you are responding to the situation. Always keep your demeanor calm. Your excited behavior may excite the animal and increase undesirable behaviors. Changing our behavior is often the key to changing our animal's behavior. Stay calm, ignore unwanted behavior, and be sure to reward desired behavior. If you skip that last step, animals often revert back to old behaviors because they don't know what else they are supposed to do. It's so easy for us to get angry and frustrated with our animals when they are misbehaving, but we often miss opportunities for rewards when they are doing something we really like. Keep an eye out for those good behaviors, reward them, and you will start seeing a positive change in your household.

Cheryl Falkenburry has been helping people solve mind-boggling animal behavior problems for over 20 years.

Send your questions and stories to:

CENTER HILL SCHOOL
3682 Bybees Church Road
Palmyra, VA 22963

cheryl@centerhillschool.com

Questions selected for use on the air or in the paper will receive a free e-mail or phone session with Cheryl.

Virginia Agriculture Is Not One-Size-Fits-All

When Richmonders attended a sold-out Richmond Forum presentation on April 18, they also had an opportunity to see and buy locally grown foods at a farmers' market organized for the event.

Todd P. Haymore, the state's commissioner of agriculture and consumer services, said the market brought forum participants face to face with producers who are part of the growing direct-sales sector.

Haymore, who serves on the Richmond Forum board, noted that those faces are just part of the big picture that is Virginia agriculture.

"Our farmers employ a variety of production methods, and I firmly believe that a solid industry of agriculture embraces all of these," Haymore said. "Our farms are large, small and in-the-middle, and production practices range from organic and free-range to no-till and traditional. It takes all of these players and all of these methods to feed the world. It also takes

good marketing practices, and this is also an area where Virginia's diversity is an asset."

Wayne F. Pryor, president of Virginia Farm Bureau, said it is encouraging that more and more consumers are associating their food with Virginia farms and farmers.

"That's making a tremendous difference," he said, "for farm families whose businesses are structured to sell to the public."

On a national level, Virginia is among the top 10 states for production of 10 different food commodities: fresh-market tomatoes (fourth); turkeys and wine (fifth); apples, summer potatoes and fresh-market snap beans (sixth); grapes (eighth); peanuts and sweet potatoes (ninth); and fresh-market cucumbers (10th).

"These are products for which there is a considerable demand," Pryor noted, "and Virginia farmers are well-positioned to grow them and make them available, both domestically and abroad."

Caring for Creatures Pet of the Week

Pumba



Pumba's quiet strength is inspiring to all who meet him. Found as a stray and brought to Caring For Creatures with

some serious injuries, he is recuperating nicely and is well on his way to a full recovery. Having survived a fractured pelvis and a rear leg amputation, Pumba's courage knows no limits.

He is a gentle-natured kitty with a sweet and friendly personality. He enjoys the company of humans and will actually put his paws tenderly around your hand, asking you to please continue the petting.

Pumba's a handsome silver gray and black tabby with a hint of white. He's been neutered and is up to date on vaccines. He would love to meet anyone looking to provide a special home to a very special kitty.

352 Sanctuary Lane • Palmyra, VA 22963
(434) 842-2404 • www.caringforcreatures.com