

Dear Stephanie,

Our two-year-old spayed female Lab cross, Cindy, has started peeing in the house again even though we've had her since she was a pup and she's been successfully house trained since she was three months old. Can you please tell me what to do? My carpets and floors are suffering-along with me trying to keep them clean!

From Janet T.

Dear Janet,

Inappropriate urination can be caused either by a medical condition or through fear and anxiety, as with our human children. The first thing you must do is determine if Cindy has a physical problem. A visit to your vet should provide a diagnosis and a remedy in this case. Meanwhile, make sure that Cindy has frequent access to the outdoors to eliminate, and be sure to provide her with plenty of fresh, clean water to drink.

While you are ruling out a physical problem, you may want to determine if there have been any changes to Cindy's daily routine within the "family pack" to help you understand if and why she may be anxious. You did not mention if Cindy urinates when she is around people or only when she is alone; and if it happens when she's with people, if it's people in general or just certain individuals. Some dogs will pee submissively while greeting more dominant pack members (human or canine). On the other hand, if she does it only while alone, it is more likely a sign of separation anxiety. It is important to understand that she is not trying to annoy or "get back at you," and that controlling your own reaction is an important part of the process.

If you observe Cindy in the act of urinating in the house, simply say the word "no" in a neutral tone and lead her outside saying, "Cindy pee." Wait with her for a few minutes to see if she'll go again. If she does, give her lots of verbal praise and a cuddle. If you observe that she pees in response to being with a particular individual, have that person tone down their interaction with her, even to the point of ignoring her if necessary, especially during greetings, so that she feels less intimidated (or excited) and more able to control herself when she is near that person.

If you discover the pee inside the house after she's done it, do not call your dog and scold her. Say "No pee" in a neutral tone. Then go and get your cleaning material, and as you wipe it up, repeat "no pee" in the same tone. (It doesn't matter if "Cindy" is present or not; just get into the habit of the neutral correction). As anybody who's used a can opener will know, dogs can hear many times louder than humans and she can hear you even if she's in another room! Take Cindy outside and wait until she eliminates, then give her lots of verbal praise and a cuddle. During your walks with Cindy, watch for her to go and when she does...you guessed it...lots of verbal praise and a cuddle.

I cannot overemphasize the importance of neutral correction. The more anxious she is about things, the less Cindy will be able to control her reactions. If you yell, act angry or shame her, she will only develop bad associations around her urination (or your discovery of it), and this will just increase her stress and anxiety, adding to the problem.

This process may look like a big chore, but if you are consistent with your neutral correction for mistakes and with your praise when she gets it right, you will eventually be successful, ending your

bigger chore of cleaning up her mistakes when she is once again successfully toilet trained.

Stephanie Prewitt