

Small Dogs

Do small dogs have their own distinct “small dog” behaviors?

Absolutely! Dogs are the most genetically flexible species on the planet. For one species, they come in an astounding variety of sizes, colors and temperaments. Through years of breeding, some dogs are large like flock guarders (Great Pyrenees and Bernese Mountain Dogs), while others are small like vermin catchers (terriers).

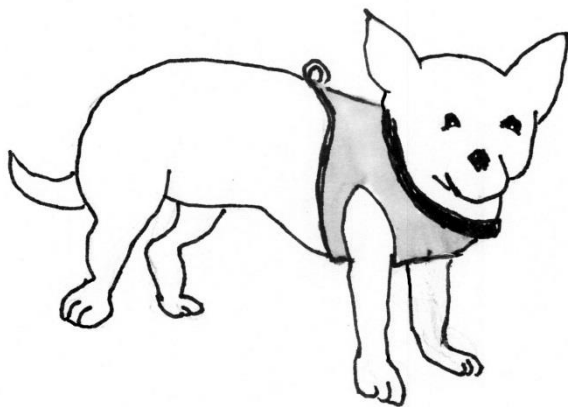
In modern society, most dog owners do not use the breed behaviors originally developed in their dogs, but that does not mean those breed specific behaviors go away. (Please review our ***Dog Breed Characteristics & Behavior*** handout.) Small dogs can still have “big dog” behaviors. Terriers often have confident personalities. Chihuahuas can be protective of their personal space. Tibetan Terriers are known as palace guardians and will bark at the presence of intruders.

Why are small dogs so popular?

Small Dogs are popular because they *are* small. They can fit in your lap, they are easier to transport and they eat less than a larger dog. But because a dog is small in stature does not mean they have small personalities and temperaments.

What are the special concerns of small dogs?

Small dogs have a “short” perspective of the world. Ankles, knees and calves are their primary view of humans. When walking through a big crowd of people, small dogs are at risk of being stepped on. People



tend to loom over small dogs, which cause many of them to crouch down or scurry away. Small dogs see the legs and bellies of larger dogs, which can make them more vulnerable to attacks. It’s not unusual for a small dog to seek out a higher perch, such as a lap or a chair, to view their domain and reduce their risks.

Because of their size, small dogs can be mistaken for prey by larger dogs, which may cause them to be chased or pawed. A common scenario is a larger dog runs up to a smaller dog on a trail. Small dogs are structurally more fragile and the pawing or chasing can put them at physical risk, so the smaller dog

becomes frightened and runs away. The larger dog may think this is a chase game and the smaller dog has become a toy to chase. The small dog has no way of knowing this and may be forced into protection mode.

Sound sensitivity: Because many small breeds were developed to sound an alarm to alert their people to potential danger, small dogs may be prone to bark more than other breeds of dogs.

Small dogs are often hand shy, which means they avoid hands over the top of their head.

Do small dogs need as much exercise as big dogs?

They may be diminutive canines, but small dogs benefit from all the activities that their bigger canine cousins enjoy. Give your small dog a chance to use all four paws for hiking, walking, retrieving, playing tug, and participating in dog sports. Small dogs also benefit from learning tricks, solving food puzzles, and using their noses in scenting classes. Physical and mental exercise is just as important for small dogs as it is for big dogs!

Can small dogs be trained?

Yes! All dogs benefit from learning basic behaviors like sit, down and come. Anything a large dog can learn a small dog is equally capable of learning. Guardians of small dogs often give them a “pass” for learning behaviors when it actually benefits all dogs to be involved in training. Small dogs particularly benefit from the confidence boost provided by a good positive reinforcement training program.

Small dogs also excel at sporting dog activities. Active, toy orientated, small dogs are especially valued in the game of flyball and their innate dexterity makes them excellent agility participants.

Training tips for small dogs:

Protect but don't coddle. Strike an informed balance between protecting your small dog and letting him experience the world on his own four paws. Don't fall into the trap of always carrying him. When people come up to greet the two of you, put your dog down on the ground and give him enough leash so he can choose to move away if he wishes.

Be proactive with larger dogs. When walking your small dog in public, when possible, move to the side of the street or path to create more space away from other dogs. Creating space away from the oncoming path of other dogs is the number one strategy you can do to keep your small dog safe.

Dog Parks: Be judicious about taking your small dog to a dog park. Stay in the separate section for little dogs, if there is one. Or better yet, teach him to retrieve or play tug with you! (Please review our **Play: Tug & Retrieving Games** handout.)

Help Me: Teach your dog a behavior such as putting his paws on your leg when he wants to be picked up to get out of a scary situation. If he learns to seek your protection in this way he'll have an alternative to an aggressive reaction to something or someone who scares him.

Accustom your dog to handling. If your dog is hand shy, teach him to approach you for clipping on his leash. While squatting, or with your dog on an elevated surface like a chair or bench, lure him to “Touch” your hand. Once he is standing or sitting calmly near you, clip the leash to his collar or harness. (Please review our **Touch** handout.)

Teach a Pick Up cue. Because many small dogs are startled when abruptly picked up, teach your dog a cue such as “Pick Up” that alerts him to your intention. (Please review our **Marker & Release Cues** handout.)

- **Step 1: Familiarize your touch**
 - Start this behavior in front of your dog by calmly touching his chest.
 - Mark and reward your dog for staying in place for this touching.

- **Step 2: Move to side & Pick Up**
 - Slowly move your hand from the front of your dog to his side using gentle pressure.
 - Cue “Pick Up” as you start gently lifting your dog’s front legs from the ground.
 - Mark and reward your dog while you pick him up.
- **Notes:**
 - Always cue “Pick Up” before you pick up your small dog.
 - Giving your dog advance notice will go a long way toward making him feel safer.

Manage your dog’s tendency to express himself. Rather than trying to get your small dog to cease barking entirely, your goal should be to determine what is causing the barking and then deciding how to manage it. (Please review our **Bark Management & Reduction** handout.)

Training Resources:

Marin Humane’s **Behavior & Training** conducts various specialty small dog training classes. Sign up on our [Behavior & Training](#) page for the next available class series.

We also provide **Dog Training Instructors** and **Consultants** available for private training or consultations (on-site or in-home) at 415.506.6280 or OhBeHAVE@MarinHumane.org.

Remember to license your dog (It’s the LAW)! If your dog gets lost, a license tag on your dog’s collar is the fastest way to reunite you and your dog. Even if your dog is microchipped, a license tag is immediately visible and doesn’t require a scanning device to read. For more information about licensing, microchipping, and other services provided by **Marin Humane**, visit us at MarinHumane.org or stop by at 171 Bel Marin Keys Blvd, Novato, CA.

