

Whining Dogs: Why and What To Do

A German shepherd dog owner once commented that no other noise could approach his dog's whine as a psychological irritant. As he spoke, the 3-year-old, intact male sat, emitting an incredibly high, piercing sound, as his collar was being firmly held by the man's wife. When dogs whine, it's always about something. In this case, "Freud" was whining because he couldn't get to me in order to bite me. Biting was the primary problem that brought his owner, a psychiatrist, for help. Freud (the dog's name, not the doctor's) was frustrated, which is the most common cause of objectionable whining.

Pain is another common cause of whining. A veterinarian once related a case in which a standard male Dachshund who had whined its owners to a state of literal distraction for three months. The dog had been examined after the first week with no problem diagnosed. The couple's four-year-old son then started saying unusual things about the dog..."Mommy, Charlie rattles." Mother thought this was just another of her imaginative child's new animal games, probably something he heard on Sesame Street.

After a month of "Mommy (or Daddy), Charlie rattles," the parents finally asked Tommy to show them how Charlie rattled. Gleefully, the lad told them to come into the dining room, which had a hardwood floor. He called Charlie, who approached with the usual whines, stood and looked mournfully at the expectant group. "Daddy, make Charlie lay down," Tommy tugged his Dad's hand. Dad told Charlie, "Down," but the dog only stood there, whining. Dad got a little dog bone, which always worked, and Charlie did his Down. But when his abdomen hit the hardwood floor, all heard a distinct 'clunk'. Needless to say, Tommy was thrilled, the parents were flabbergasted, and after the veterinarian was consulted again, Charlie underwent surgery for what the doctor described as three of the "largest bladder stones I've ever seen."

The moral of this true story is...don't ever treat as a behavior problem a chronic whiner who hasn't had a thorough veterinary examination in order to rule out pain as a possible cause.

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