

Don't get angry with your furry friends, they're just doing what comes naturally

Living with someone can be frustrating at times and they might be doing things that drive you up the wall. The same situation can be applied to pets, but it isn't always your animal's fault, it may simply be behaving naturally and you are the one who does not understand.

Animal behaviourist and veterinary surgeon Cynthia Smillie, at Animal Behaviour Veterinary Practice, reveals some common dog and cat problems.

Smillie says many cases involve dogs with temperament issues: aggression or fear towards other people or dogs.

"A problem is very often a result of poor socialisation, particularly when an animal is very young," she explains. "Socialisation is essential to develop a reliable temperament. We expect an awful lot of them when we put them in an environment that is alien to them.

"The way an animal lives in the wild [conflicts with what] we expect in a domestic environment and how they should behave."

The animal behaviourist explains aggression and fear mainly stem from three developmental situations.

The animal may be inherently abnormal and act inappropriately despite a healthy environment, or it has experienced an abnormal social system and environment, which has resulted in it developing a problem. Finally, the environment is normal, but the animal has responded inappropriately.

When you think your pet is misbehaving, it might be acting perfectly normal in its world.

As domesticated animals have been bred for generations to perform certain requirements, Smillie says they can exhibit different intrinsic traits. For example, Collies like to herd and Terriers like to retrieve objects.

So, in a pristine Mid-Levels apartment, a dog's need to find rodents in the ground, or in your sofa, may be seen as a sign of disobedience.

"A Terrier wrecking the furniture can be seen as destructive, but they are only trying to have an outlet for their normal behavioural needs," says Smillie, a former deputy



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executive director at the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to animals.

For cats, a big no-no is urinating indoors. "Spraying in the apartment is a difficult behaviour to get rid of but, for the cat, it's normal," she says. "Often, it's a response to stress in the home or a threatening [situation], and spraying makes it feel more safe and secure, but for the owner it's inappropriate."

According to Smillie, there are two kinds of urination. The first is a horizontal spray, usually in small quantities, on a wall. This might be accompanied by a vacant look and kneading its paws, which is usually in response to a threat. The second is urinating in large quantities on a horizontal surface, such as a floor. "[The latter] is a problem with a wrong place. The cat doesn't like the litter box because it needs to be cleaner, or there might be a medical reason like a urinary tract infection," she says. "There could be 50 reasons why the litter tray is in the wrong place, maybe it's in the

kitchen and it's too noisy. Very often it's in a location where the cat doesn't feel it's private enough or safe or secure."

Another cat conundrum is when there are two or more felines in the home. As many owners may think their cat would be lonely by itself, acquiring one or more cats may create more problems.

"Within their social circle in the wild, cats are naturally solitary hunters. But if we have a multicat household, we expect cats to mix within the home. People don't understand their natural social structure or how a dog or cat would normally live," she explains. "We are trying to impose our perception of what would be good for the animal ... There is no easy answer to a problem. You have to look at their motivation [for a certain behaviour] and at what threat they are perceiving." *Jade Lee-Duffy*