

Some More Myths About Animal Behavior

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Recently we have had some questions from our clients and friends that are a bit more complicated than they sound. We thought we would share the explanations with you.

1. “If a cat smells the urine of another animal like a dog, it will cause him to urinate in the same area.” We have seen hundreds of cases of inappropriate elimination in dogs and cats and have never seen a case where the smell of urine from another species stimulates elimination. If a cat smells the urine odors of another cat, that may sometimes lead the cat to eliminate in the same area. The same can be true of dogs. While cats and dogs can probably detect urine odors of one another, this does not seem to lead to elimination.

2. “Male dogs only lift their legs to urinate and females only squat.” As a general rule, this is true. However, there is a substantial individual variation in the elimination postures of both males and females. Males may squat to urinate and some females elevate their legs. If your female dog doesn’t squat or your male doesn’t lift his leg, it doesn’t mean there’s something wrong with them. It’s probably just normal variation.

3. “Fixing (neutering) a male cat or dog removes his desire to mate with females.” Neutering greatly diminishes the sexual desire of most male cats and dogs, but it doesn’t totally eliminate it in all individuals. In one study of laboratory research cats, it was found that some neutered males continued to try to court and mate with females for as long as two years after the surgery. Neutering does remove the animal’s ability to father offspring.

4. “You can’t teach an old dog new tricks.” Age in and of itself is not a hindrance in teaching dogs (or cats or even people) new things. It is true that things learned in the past can interfere with new learning. Since older dogs often have learned more than younger ones, they may learn more slowly than young puppies whose brains aren’t filled with as many other things. Teaching older dogs may take more time and patience than teaching young animals.