

Training, Not Punishing

Your dog tips over the kitchen trash whenever she's left alone. You scold her when you get home, but she continues to dump the trash. Only now, she cowers and has that "guilty" look. Well, she obviously knows she's done something wrong, right? Wrong.

Animals live in the present

Your dog does not associate your anger with actions that he did earlier in the day. If you yell at him when he is excitedly greeting you, he will soon associate your anger with the greeting and not the unacceptable behavior.

Then why does she look guilty?

Your dog doesn't know why you are angry. Her guilty look is submissive behavior to show you she knows you are angry, but she doesn't understand why.

To punish or not to punish

Punishment is an impractical and sometimes damaging way of training your pet. For punishment to be effective, you have to catch your pet in the act every single time she does it. And that's not easy to do.

So, what can I do?

First move the trash can, so your pet can't reach it; or put a lid on it, so she can't get into it. If your dog is chewing houseplants, coat the leaves with a bitter, pet-safe substance. Then give your pet his own, safe plants to chew on, and reward him for eating those.

Also, consider keeping your dog in a crate while you're away. Crating your dog is a humane way to keep your dog out of trouble while you can't be there to "catch him in the act." You'll save yourself, your dog, and your belongings from harm while giving your pet the safety and comfort of his own den.