



Chasing

Chasing is a normal and instinctual dog behavior. Often the desire to chase is more prevalent in herding breeds and sight hounds but can occur in any breed of dog. Many dogs have the instinct to chase potential prey, like squirrels, cats and birds. Others will express an instinct to herd things through chasing moving objects like runners or skateboarders. Chasing something may be constructive when it is a game like fetch, but it can be frustrating for you and very dangerous for your dog, putting them at risk of being lost, injured or killed. It is definitely not neighborly to let your dog chase the neighbor's children or pets. Many states make it illegal to harass wildlife. When addressing chasing, management is crucial, while also working on your dog's impulse control. In some cases, it may be beneficial to channel your dog's instinct into games or sports. Regardless of why your dog wants to chase, the behavior itself can be very fun and self-rewarding for the dog, making it a difficult behavior to change.

As with all problem behaviors, the solution starts with management. Your dog cannot be allowed to practice the behavior. Leashes, long lines and barriers are the best lines of defense. You can use these tools and try to avoid areas and times of high stimulus for your dog. Walking by a dog park while dogs are playing only sets your dog for failure if they like to chase other dogs.

Next, you will need to work on establishing impulse control in your dog. This starts with getting your dog to focus. If your dog is looking at something, they are thinking about it and the odds of reacting skyrocket. Your dog cannot chase what they don't see! Reward your dog for checking in frequently with very high value treats in a non-chase situation. Then progress to working on the automatic focus at a distance from the chase object where your dog is successful at checking in. The key is to heavily reward ANY attention you receive from your dog. For some dogs, playing with a toy is more rewarding than food when they are ready for action. As your dog is successful, you could move closer to the chase object and practice with the dog off the leash, in a fenced in yard.

Teaching a solid Leave It is great for impulse control and becomes very useful in these situations. Building and maintaining a strong Come When Called will also help. If your dog struggles with any of these cues, it is crucial to move back to the point your dog was successful and build from there. It is tempting to jump ahead before your dog is truly consistent with performing a behavior. Without a strong foundation, the cue will crumble under the weight of a high value distraction. Slow, steady and consistent are the keys to success. If your dog does chase something, it is very important that you do not join in by chasing your dog. Dog chases squirrel, then you chase dog is not a good game to play.

Sometime letting the dog have a replacement behavior is helpful. Fetch, Tug, Tag, and Hide and Seek are all good games to play with your dog to help curb the desire to chase something down.

- **Fetch**- This lets your dog practice chasing a ball or a toy instead of the car or cat.



- **Tug-** A great game for high energy dogs and a fun way to get the dog to engage with you. To maintain the dog's impulse control, you should be the one to initiate the game. Incorporate Drop It into the game before immediately continuing to tug.
- **Tag-** This is essentially having the dog chase you. Start with a handful of rewards and run a few steps away while calling your dog's name. Try not to use your recall word because that involves your dog specifically coming to you. For Tag, chasing you, running near you or touching a hand target are all acceptable.
- **Hide and Seek-** Toss a treat a few feet away for your dog to find. While your dog finds the treat, hide and call your dog excitedly. It is best to start this game in the house without much distraction.

Avoid having your dog chase a laser dot. While it may burn off extra energy, it can be reinforcing for the chase behavior, overstimulating for your dog's mental state and may lead to compulsive behaviors in some dogs. Certified Animal Behaviorists such as Karen B. London, PhD, have come out entirely against using a laser for chase with dogs. Because the dog can NEVER catch the light, the dog becomes extremely frustrated, leading to behavior problems and psychological damage.

Changing the chase behavior can be a challenge. Focus on management, redirection and building impulse control. Together with your PetSmart Trainer you can develop the skills to help your dog lessen their need to chase.