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## Spraying cat can be cured

By Dr. Jeff Nichol

*Of the Journal*

Q: Lalo (age 13 months, neutered male cat) started urinating in places other than the litter pan. First it was my husband's toolbox. Now he has taken to peeing in my ficus tree and in one corner of my son's room. This is disgusting. I work full time, my husband is away on travel most of the year and I sometimes have to leave town to deal with an aging parent. There is another male cat who comes to the window to "visit" Lalo. Is there something that can be done to help this otherwise adorable kitty?

Dr. Nichol: There's nothing like cat urine for lubricating a set of tools. And your ficus tree — it can't be any happier than your husband and son. Urine soiling is seriously frustrating, but nearly every one of these kitties is manageable.

There is a long list of possible causes for this assault on good housekeeping. Lalo's special visitor may have a lot to do with his lapses in bathroom etiquette. Your boy may feel intimidated. Even if he appears friendly toward this vagabond, he may have territorial motives for spray painting your home with feline graffiti.

I recommend uninviting Lalo's guest with a Scare Crow (motion activated sprinkler), [www.pestproducts.com](http://www.pestproducts.com), or a Cat Stop (high-pitched sound), [www.scatmat.com](http://www.scatmat.com). You will also need to completely eliminate any hint of odor from past indoor urinations and make it easy for Lalo to succeed with improved litter pan management. Go to my Web site ([www.drjeffnichol.com](http://www.drjeffnichol.com)) for particulars.

There may be another important factor. You folks are gone a lot, raising the possibility that Lalo is urine soiling due to separation anxiety. Buspirone and paroxetine are anti-anxiety medications that could help him relax and behave better. There is better living through modern chemistry.

Bad dog owner!

Dogs with behavior problems, along with those undergoing basic obedience training, can be at the receiving end of some ill-informed and down right inhumane methods. A new position statement released by the American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior, of which I am a member, warns against

punishment-based dog training.

According to Dr. Sophia Yin, "Punishment can be defined as the use of force/aversion, coercion, or physical corrections in order to change an animal's behavior. The Dog Whisperer has stoked the popularity of the punishment-based method, which veterinary specialists call outdated and, at times, dangerous for pets and their owners. Short televised segments can mislead pet owners about the time investment required for effective behavior modifications. Inconsistent reactions from pet owners can exacerbate anxiety in dogs, which may lead to aggression."

Instead of yelling at dogs, holding them down in an "alpha roll" or using choke chains or pinch collars, Yin and the AVSAB suggest determining how the pet is being rewarded for the bad behavior, remove that reward and control the environment, and reward a more appropriate behavior.

"While punishment-based approaches may seem to work, they force the dog to mask the behavior while the dog becomes more anxious," Yin said. As a result, "many dogs are likely to get worse/more aggressive in the future." The bottom line: Quick fixes seldom succeed.

Dr. Jeff Nichol provides medical care for pets at the Petroglyph Animal Hospital in Albuquerque (898-8874). He treats behavior disorders at the Veterinary Specialty Centers in Albuquerque and in Santa Fe (505-792-5131). Contact Dr. Nichol on his Web site [www.drjeffnichol.com](http://www.drjeffnichol.com) (click Submit a Question?) or 6100 Fourth St. NW, Box 299, Albuquerque, NM 87107.

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