

## Diesel Loves Attention

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Four years ago I adopted Diesel a puppy, Siberian Husky. Because I had studied full time and worked part time, Diesel often had to wait for seven to eight hours to “go outside.” Although previously there had not been a problem, he suddenly began defecating inside.

First, I thought Diesel was having accidents, so I checked my apartment more frequently to let Diesel out during the day. But these “accidents” continued, occurring one to two times weekly.

I had used positive reinforcement for “potty” outside, so I reinstated this procedure. This too was ineffective. Like many dog owners, I tried scolding after Diesel defecated in the house but this failed too.

Through my part-time work with children with autism, I had been using basic behavior analytic procedures, including analyzing antecedents and consequences of behavior. Although I had tried some antecedent manipulations with Diesel, I further analyzed the consequences of his misbehavior.

Diesel didn’t defecate in the house before I had arrived home; rather he defected *after* my arrival, even after I let him outside. I also considered my behavior immediately before his misbehavior occurred. Before each occurrence, I wasn’t looking at Diesel. When he misbehaved, I immediately scolded Diesel. My scolding did not stop the

misbehavior, rather it seemed to maintain or reinforce it. If looking at Diesel and scolding him had increased the behavior, then not doing so might decrease it.

Thereafter, when Diesel defecated in the house, I just cleaned up his mess and for a while ignored him. Indeed his misbehavior decreased, only occurring twice more in two weeks. Because his misbehavior appeared to be controlled by my interacting with him, I began attending to Diesel more often contingent upon his obeying commands (e.g., “sit,” “down”). The problem behavior has not returned!

I have since reduced or eliminated other undesirable behavior. How? By withholding attention after their occurrence; and strengthening desirable behavior by offering attention after their occurrence.