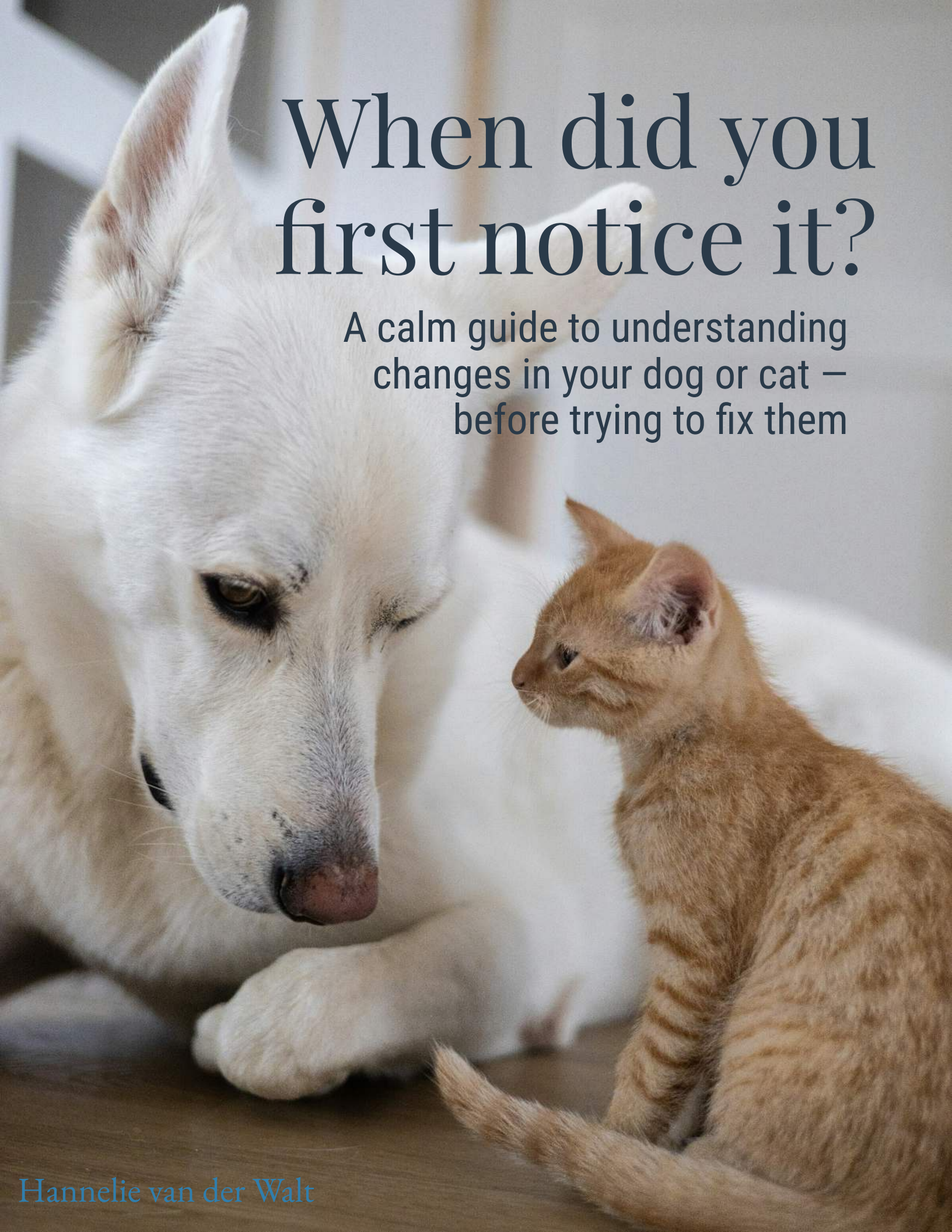


A close-up photograph of a white dog, possibly a Weimaraner, lying down and looking towards a small orange tabby kitten. The dog's head is in the foreground, and the kitten is sitting next to it, looking back at the dog. The background is a soft, out-of-focus indoor setting.

When did you first notice it?

A calm guide to understanding
changes in your dog or cat —
before trying to fix them

When Did You First Notice It?

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Introduction

Understanding Comes Before Fixing

Most dog and cat owners don't go looking for advice because everything is fine.

They do it because something has changed.

Their dog or cat is behaving differently.

Reacting differently.

Coping differently.

And the most unsettling part is not the behaviour itself — it's not knowing **why**.

This guide was written for that moment.

Not when things are clearly broken,
but when something feels *off*, confusing, or unfamiliar.

When did you first notice it

Why behaviour changes are so often misunderstood

When behaviour changes appear, owners are usually met with:

- quick explanations
- strong opinions
- loud advice
- pressure to act immediately

This often leads to:

- doing too much, too quickly
- reacting emotionally instead of thoughtfully
- choosing the wrong kind of help
- making well-intended decisions that worsen the situation

Most problems don't escalate because owners don't care.

They escalate because owners don't have **context**.

The question that changes everything

In real life, when people ask for help, the most useful question is rarely:

When did you first notice it

“What is your dog doing?”

“How bad is it?”

“Have you tried training?”

The question that brings clarity is much simpler:

When did you first notice it?

Because behaviour does not exist in isolation.

It exists in **time**, **environment**, **comfort**, and **experience**.

Understanding *when* something began often explains *why* it's happening — and what kind of response is actually helpful.

What this guide is — and what it isn't

This guide is:

- a way to slow down
- a way to recognise patterns
- a way to understand change before reacting
- a way to choose the right next step

When did you first notice it

This guide is not:

- a training manual
- a list of quick fixes
- a collection of techniques
- a replacement for veterinary or professional care

You won't find instructions telling you what to "make" your pet do.

Instead, you'll find guidance to help you understand what your pet may be **responding to**.

Why this matters over time

Animals change as they age.

Households change.

Routines shift.

Tolerance changes.

What worked before may no longer work now —
not because anyone failed, but because circumstances changed.

Many of the situations in this guide are not about disobedience, dominance, or bad habits.

When did you first notice it

They are about:

- reduced tolerance
- discomfort
- stress
- uncertainty
- loss of predictability
- unmet emotional or physical needs

When these are recognised early, problems often become **manageable instead of overwhelming**.

Before you begin

Most dogs and cats are not broken.

Most owners are not doing something wrong.

They are navigating change without a map.

This guide exists to offer that map — calmly, thoughtfully, and without judgement.

Understanding comes first.

Everything else follows.

When did you first notice it

How to Use This Guide

A Calm Approach to Understanding Change

This guide is not meant to be read like a textbook.

You don't need to start at the beginning and work your way through.

Most people won't.

Start with what feels familiar

Begin by finding the situation that most closely resembles what you're experiencing.

You may recognise:

- one clear situation, or
- parts of several sections

That's normal.

Behaviour changes don't always fit neatly into categories, and this guide reflects that reality.

When did you first notice it

Read slowly – not urgently

This guide works best when read **without pressure**.

You are not looking for quick fixes.

You are looking for **orientation**.

As you read, notice:

- what sounds familiar
- what helps you see the situation differently
- what makes you pause and think

If a sentence makes you nod quietly, pay attention to it.

Focus on *when*, not just *what*

Throughout this guide, you'll be encouraged to think about timing.

Questions like:

- When did this start?
- Was the change sudden or gradual?
- What else was happening around that time?
- What has changed in routine, environment, or comfort?

When did you first notice it

These questions matter more than labels.

Understanding *when* something began often explains *why* it's happening — and what kind of response is appropriate.

Use this guide to choose your next step

This guide does not replace professional help.

What it does is help you decide:

- whether to pause and observe
- whether to adjust environment or routine
- whether to rule out discomfort or pain
- whether to seek professional guidance — and from whom

Choosing the **right kind of help** at the right time often prevents problems from escalating.

You don't need to fix everything at once

Many owners feel pressure to act immediately.

This guide encourages something different:

When did you first notice it

- understanding before action
- clarity before correction
- support before pressure

Often, doing *less* — but doing the *right* thing — leads to better outcomes.

If nothing fits exactly

If none of the situations feel like a perfect match, start with:

“Nothing is obviously wrong — but something feels off.”

That section exists because many changes don’t present clearly at first.

Trust that instinct.

It’s often the earliest and most important signal.

A gentle reminder

This guide is not about blame.

It’s about recognising that:

When did you first notice it

- behaviour is communication
- animals respond to change
- understanding reduces conflict
- clarity leads to better decisions

You're here because you care.

That already matters.

Understanding Professional Help — In Plain Language

Many owners know they may need “professional help” — but don't know **what kind, when, or why**.

The word *behaviourist* alone causes confusion.

Some people imagine forceful training.

Others picture television personalities.

Many don't realise there are **very different roles** involved.

This guide encourages one simple principle:

When did you first notice it

Rule out discomfort or pain first — then address behaviour clearly and calmly.

Here's how to think about professional support in practical terms.

When to start with a general veterinarian

A veterinarian is often the **first and most important step** when behaviour changes appear suddenly or don't make sense.

A vet's role here is not to "label" behaviour.

It is to determine whether the **body** is influencing what you're seeing.

A general veterinarian should be involved when:

- behaviour changes appear suddenly
- aggression or guarding seems out of character
- anxiety appears without a clear trigger
- a senior pet becomes irritable or withdrawn
- habits change alongside appetite, sleep, or energy

Many behaviour changes are driven — or worsened — by pain, discomfort, hormonal shifts, or illness.

When did you first notice it

When discomfort is addressed, behaviour often becomes clearer.

When a veterinarian with behavioural training is appropriate

Some veterinarians have additional training in behaviour and emotional health.

They are especially helpful when:

- behaviour changes are complex or severe
- anxiety, fear, or aggression escalates
- medication may need to be considered
- physical and emotional factors overlap

A veterinary behaviourist looks at:

- health
- neurology
- emotional state
- and behaviour **together**, not separately

This type of support is especially valuable for:

- sudden aggression
- severe anxiety or panic
- senior pets with personality changes

When did you first notice it

When a dog or cat behaviour specialist is appropriate

A behaviour specialist focuses on **learning, environment, routine, and interaction** — not force or dominance.

They are best involved when:

- the animal is physically well
- triggers are predictable
- behaviour is linked to environment or experience
- the goal is understanding and adjustment

A behaviour specialist helps you change:

- conditions
- expectations
- routines
- interactions

They do **not** “fix” animals.

They help animals cope more comfortably within their world.

When immediate professional support is necessary

Some situations require **prompt, in-person help**, regardless of cause.

When did you first notice it

Seek immediate support when:

- injuries occur
- aggression escalates
- fear leads to panic or escape attempts
- an animal is a danger to themselves or others

In these cases, waiting does not protect the animal — it delays relief.

Why choosing the right help matters

Behaviour problems often escalate not because help wasn't sought — but because the **wrong kind of help** was chosen first.

This guide exists to help you:

- slow down
- understand what changed
- and choose support that fits the situation

Clarity prevents unnecessary pressure — on both you and your pet.

A final reassurance about seeking help

Needing support does not mean you've failed.

When did you first notice it

It means you recognised that:

- behaviour is communication
- change has a cause
- and understanding comes before correction

Choosing the *right* help, at the *right* time, is one of the most responsible decisions an owner can make.

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When did you first notice it

Finding the “When”

How to Reconstruct What Changed — Even If You Don’t Remember

When people are asked,

“When did you first notice this?”

many genuinely don’t know.

That doesn’t mean nothing changed.

It usually means the change didn’t feel important *at the time*.

Behaviour changes often begin quietly — and memory doesn’t work in dates.

It works in **events, feelings, and associations**.

This section is here to help you reconstruct what happened — calmly and without pressure.

Start by widening the timeline

Instead of trying to remember an exact day, think in **periods**.

Ask yourself:

When did you first notice it

- Was this weeks ago, months ago, or longer?
- Was it before or after a holiday?
- Was it before or after a vet visit?
- Was it before or after a routine or household change?

Once you find a *general window*, details often start to surface.

Use records you already have

Most people remember more than they realise — just not all at once.

Helpful places to look:

- old photos or videos on your phone
- WhatsApp chats or messages
- calendar entries
- vet invoices or appointment reminders
- grooming or boarding dates

Photos are especially powerful — they often trigger memory of what was happening at that time.

Think beyond the pet

When did you first notice it

One of the biggest blind spots owners have is assuming the change must involve the pet directly.

Very often, the change happened **around** the pet.

Ask yourself whether any of the following occurred around the time things began to feel different.

When did you first notice it

Household and people changes

- Did anyone move into or out of the home?
- Were there visitors staying over?
- Did someone become ill, hospitalised, or pass away?
- Were there relationship changes (marriage, separation, divorce, a new partner)?
- Were there emotional changes in the household (stress, grief, depression)?
- Did children's routines change, or did they start bringing friends home more often?

Animals are extremely sensitive to emotional and social shifts — even when nothing looks “different”.

Environment and routine changes

- Did you move furniture or rearrange rooms?
- Did you change flooring, carpets, or paint?
- Did you do building, plumbing, electrical, or garden work?
- Did you get new domestic workers, gardeners, or service staff?
- Did work-from-home routines change?
- Did you start going out more, or returning to the office?
- Did you join a club, gym, or start evening activities?

When did you first notice it

Small routine shifts often matter more than big events.

Sound, smell, and sensory changes

Animals experience the world differently to humans.

Consider:

- new lawn equipment or louder machinery
- pesticide, rat poison, or garden treatments
- cleaning products or air fresheners
- new pet beds, blankets, or household fabrics
- changes in water source (municipal, borehole, bottled)

What feels insignificant to us can feel disruptive to an animal.

Pet-related changes (even subtle ones)

- New pets — even birds, rabbits, or visiting animals
- Changes in feeding bowls or food
- Deworming, tick, or flea treatments (and reactions)
- Grooming routines or products
- Vet visits (and why they happened)
- Pet sitters, kennelling, or time away
- Changes in exercise, access, or supervision

When did you first notice it

Sometimes the trigger isn't what was done —
but **how the pet experienced it**.

Health and travel events

- Car accidents or near misses
- Long drives or stressful trips
- Funerals, weddings, or emotional gatherings
- Holidays or short weekends away
- Illness or injury in the household
- Changes in sleep patterns or energy

Animals remember stress, even when humans move on.

If this feels like “too much”

You are not expected to answer every question.

The goal is not perfection —
it's **pattern recognition**.

Often, one or two moments suddenly stand out and make sense of everything else.

That's enough.

When did you first notice it

Why this matters

Behaviour rarely changes without context.

When owners can reconstruct **what changed**, they:

- stop blaming themselves
- stop blaming the pet
- choose the right kind of help sooner
- avoid unnecessary escalation

Understanding *when* something began is not about dwelling on the past.

It's about giving the present **meaning**.

A final reassurance

If you still can't pinpoint a moment, that's okay.

Not all answers arrive immediately.

But learning how to *look* for context is often the first step toward clarity — and that alone can change how you respond.

Situation 1

When did you first notice it

“My dog is chewing, digging, or destroying things.”

This is often the behaviour that pushes owners to seek help.

It's frustrating.

It's costly.

And it can feel personal.

Owners often describe it as:

- “He knows better.”
- “She’s doing it for attention.”
- “He has toys — why this?”
- “I don’t understand why it’s suddenly so bad.”

Before trying to stop the behaviour, the most important question remains:

When did this start — and what changed around that time?

Because destructive behaviour rarely appears without a reason.

Why this behaviour triggers such a strong reaction

Chewing and digging are often interpreted as:

When did you first notice it

- defiance
- boredom
- bad habits
- lack of training

From a human perspective, destruction feels deliberate.

From a dog's perspective, it is usually **functional**.

Dogs chew and dig to:

- regulate stress
- cope with frustration
- self-soothe
- release tension
- create a sense of control in an environment that feels unpredictable

The behaviour is not aimed at upsetting the owner —
it's aimed at helping the dog cope.

What chewing and digging can actually signal

Destructive behaviour often reflects **change**, not disobedience.

When did you first notice it

Common underlying contributors include:

Stress or anxiety

Changes in routine, household tension, confinement, or uncertainty can increase the need for physical coping outlets.

Reduced tolerance

As dogs mature or age, their ability to tolerate frustration may decrease, even if nothing else appears different.

Loss of predictability

When routines change, dogs may use repetitive behaviours to regain a sense of familiarity.

Understimulation or mismatched stimulation

This is not always about “not enough exercise”, but about the *wrong* type or timing of stimulation.

Environmental change

Moving house, renovations, new animals, or changes in access to outdoor spaces often coincide with increased chewing or digging.

When did you first notice it

Destruction is often a **response**, not the original problem.

What owners often do that makes it worse

In an attempt to stop the behaviour, owners may:

- scold or punish after the fact
- restrict access without addressing the cause
- increase control or confinement
- assume the dog is being “naughty”
- escalate corrections as the behaviour continues

Unfortunately, these responses often:

- increase stress
- remove coping outlets
- intensify frustration
- push the behaviour elsewhere rather than resolving it

Pressure treats the behaviour as the problem —
when the behaviour is usually a symptom.

A calmer way to understand what’s happening

Instead of asking:

When did you first notice it

“How do I stop this?”

Ask:

- What changed before this behaviour began?
- Is my dog coping with something new or different?
- Has my dog's routine, freedom, or predictability shifted?
- Is this behaviour happening during specific times or situations?

Chewing and digging often tell you **when** your dog is struggling — not that your dog is misbehaving.

When to pause — and when to act

This behaviour often improves with calm adjustment when:

- the dog is otherwise relaxed and healthy
- triggers are identifiable
- routines can be stabilised
- appropriate outlets are provided
- stressors are reduced

It deserves **professional input** when:

When did you first notice it

- destruction appears suddenly in an adult or senior dog
- anxiety escalates
- the dog cannot settle when alone
- behaviour becomes compulsive or frantic
- other behaviour changes appear at the same time

As with all sudden changes, **ruling out discomfort or pain first** is an important step — especially if tolerance has noticeably decreased.

The most important takeaway

Dogs don't destroy things because they don't care.

They destroy things because:

Something in their world has become harder to cope with.

When you understand *why* the behaviour started,
you stop fighting the symptom —
and start addressing the cause.

That's where real change becomes possible.

Situation 2

When did you first notice it

“My dog doesn’t come when called — he used to.”

This is one of the most common frustrations owners talk about.

It often gets described as stubbornness or defiance:

- “He knows his name — he just ignores me.”
- “She listens when she wants to.”
- “He used to come every time.”
- “It’s like he’s suddenly selective.”

Before trying to correct the behaviour, the most important question is:

When did this change — and what does coming to you usually mean for your dog now?

Because recall doesn’t break randomly.

Why this behaviour triggers such strong reactions

To people, coming when called feels basic.

It’s often interpreted as:

When did you first notice it

- respect
- obedience
- relationship quality
- proof that training “worked”

When a dog stops responding, it can feel personal — as if the dog is choosing not to listen.

From the dog’s perspective, recall is not about obedience.

It is an **emotional decision**, based on past experience.

Dogs don’t ask:

“Do I know this command?”

They ask:

“What usually happens when I go there?”

What a breakdown in recall can actually signal

When recall changes, it’s usually because the **meaning of being called has shifted**.

When did you first notice it

Common contributors include:

Negative associations

Being called to be scolded, restrained, medicated, groomed, or taken somewhere unpleasant can quietly change a dog's response.

Loss of reward or connection

If coming when called leads to being ignored, dismissed, or immediately controlled, motivation fades.

Increased environmental pull

As dogs mature, distractions can become more meaningful than the owner's presence — especially if recall hasn't been reinforced emotionally.

Reduced tolerance or confidence

Age, discomfort, or stress can reduce a dog's willingness to move toward pressure or unpredictability.

Repeated pressure after hesitation

Calling louder, repeating the cue, or approaching angrily often confirms the dog's concern rather than resolving it.

When did you first notice it

Recall rarely disappears — it erodes.

What owners often do that makes it worse

When dogs don't respond, owners may:

- raise their voice
- repeat the dog's name over and over
- chase the dog down
- scold the dog once they finally come
- interpret hesitation as defiance

Unfortunately, these responses often teach the dog:

"Coming closer makes things worse."

Avoidance then becomes logical.

A calmer way to understand what's happening

Instead of asking:

"How do I make my dog come?"

Ask:

When did you first notice it

- What does my dog associate with being called?
- When was the last time my dog came to me and nothing unpleasant followed?
- Has coming to me become neutral, negative, or unpredictable?
- Did this change happen around a specific period or event?

Recall is not just a behaviour.

It's a **reflection of trust, predictability, and outcome**.

When to pause – and when to act

This situation often improves with awareness and adjustment when:

- the dog still seeks connection in other ways
- avoidance is situational
- there is no fear or distress when approached
- routines and interactions can be adjusted

It deserves **professional input** when:

When did you first notice it

- recall worsens suddenly
- the dog actively avoids being caught
- fear, anxiety, or shutdown behaviours appear
- hearing, pain, or age-related changes may be involved

As with other behaviour changes, **ruling out discomfort or pain first** is an important step — especially if responsiveness has declined.

The most important takeaway

Dogs don't stop coming because they forget.

They stop coming because:

Coming to you no longer feels safe, fair, or worthwhile.

When recall breaks down, it's not a failure of training.

It's feedback about the relationship —
and listening to that feedback is where improvement begins.

Situation 3

When did you first notice it

“My dog is suddenly anxious or scared — especially when left alone.”

This change can be deeply unsettling for owners.

A dog who was once relaxed may suddenly:

- become nervous or on edge
- startle easily
- cling constantly
- pace, pant, or vocalise
- struggle to settle
- panic when left alone

Owners often say:

- “He was never like this before.”
- “She’s suddenly anxious when I leave.”
- “Nothing happened directly to him.”
- “I don’t know what caused it.”

Before trying to label or fix the behaviour, the most important question is:

When did you first notice it

When did you first notice the fear — and what was happening around that time?

Because anxiety rarely appears without a reason.

Why fear and anxiety often appear *after* the trigger

One of the most misunderstood aspects of anxiety — including separation distress — is timing.

Dogs don't always react immediately to frightening or destabilising events.

They may:

- cope in the moment
- suppress their response
- appear “fine”

Only later — sometimes days or weeks afterward — does anxiety surface.

This delayed response commonly follows:

When did you first notice it

- house break-ins or attempted burglaries
- sudden intrusions into the home
- prolonged stress
- illness or recovery
- changes in routine or household presence
- loss of a companion (human or animal)

To the dog, the world has become **less predictable** — and being alone may now feel unsafe.

What anxiety and separation distress can actually signal

Anxiety is not about weakness or attention-seeking.

It often reflects:

- loss of emotional safety
- reduced confidence in familiar spaces
- heightened vigilance
- inability to relax without reassurance

Separation anxiety, in particular, is not about missing the owner — it's about **panic when predictability disappears**.

When did you first notice it

The behaviour is not deliberate.

It is a stress response.

What owners often do that makes it worse

With the best intentions, owners may:

- reassure excessively
- sneak away to avoid upsetting the dog
- force independence too quickly
- scold destruction after returning
- ignore the behaviour in hopes it resolves

Unfortunately, these responses can:

- increase confusion
- add pressure
- heighten anxiety
- remove the dog's sense of safety

Fear cannot be corrected through firmness.

It must be **understood and reduced**.

When did you first notice it

A calmer way to understand what's happening

Instead of asking:

“How do I stop this behaviour?”

Ask:

- What changed before this anxiety appeared?
- Did my dog experience a loss of safety or routine?
- Has my dog's ability to cope alone changed?
- Is my dog anticipating something going wrong?

Anxiety is rarely about the present moment alone.

It's about **what the dog expects might happen next**.

When to pause — and when to act

This situation often improves with support and adjustment when:

- anxiety is specific rather than constant
- the dog still eats, sleeps, and seeks comfort
- the environment can be made predictable again
- pressure is reduced

When did you first notice it

It needs **professional input** when:

- panic escalates
- anxiety generalises to many situations
- the dog cannot settle
- destruction appears only during absences
- fear leads to self-harm or escape attempts

As with all sudden behaviour changes, **ruling out discomfort or pain first** is essential — especially in senior dogs.

The most important takeaway

Dogs don't become anxious because they are weak or demanding.

They become anxious because:

Their sense of safety has changed.

Understanding *when* that change occurred is the first step toward helping them feel secure again — not through pressure, but through clarity and support.

Situation 4

“My dog is suddenly fighting with other dogs – they used to get along.”

This is one of the most alarming changes owners experience.

Dogs who have lived together peacefully may suddenly:

- growl at one another
- snap or fight
- avoid shared spaces
- react around food, resting areas, or movement

Owners often say:

- “They’ve lived together for years.”
- “This came out of nowhere.”
- “He’s never been aggressive.”
- “I don’t understand what changed.”

Before trying to stop the conflict, the most important question is:

When did you first notice it

When did you first notice the tension — not the fight, but the change before it?

Because fights are rarely the first sign.

Why this behaviour feels so shocking

To owners, fighting feels like a sudden breakdown of trust.

It's often interpreted as:

- dominance struggles
- jealousy
- rivalry
- a failure to “establish hierarchy”

In reality, most dog-to-dog conflict is not about power.

It's about **safety, tolerance, and balance**.

When balance shifts, conflict becomes more likely — even between dogs who once got along well.

When did you first notice it

What inter-dog conflict can actually signal

Conflict between dogs who previously coexisted peacefully often follows a **change in one or more dogs**.

Common contributors include:

Age-related changes

As dogs age, tolerance often decreases. Pain, stiffness, or fatigue can lower patience and increase irritability.

Discomfort or illness

A dog in pain may react defensively, especially when approached or startled.

Loss of predictability

Changes in routine, environment, or household stress can destabilise previously stable relationships.

Resource sensitivity

Food, resting spaces, attention, or movement through narrow areas can become flashpoints when tolerance drops.

When did you first notice it

Unequal coping ability

One dog may struggle more than another, upsetting the balance that once kept the peace.

Conflict is often a response to vulnerability — not aggression.

What owners often do that makes it worse

In an effort to restore order, owners may:

- force dogs to “work it out”
- punish warning signals like growling
- increase pressure around shared spaces
- keep dogs together without supervision
- assume the issue is purely behavioural

Unfortunately, these responses can:

- remove early warning signals
- increase fear or defensiveness
- escalate conflict rather than resolve it

Growling is communication.

When it’s punished, dogs often skip straight to fighting.

When did you first notice it

A calmer way to understand what's happening

Instead of asking:

“Why are they fighting?”

Ask:

- Which dog changed first?
- Did one dog age, slow down, or become less tolerant?
- Did anything change in health, routine, or environment?
- Are certain situations more tense than others?

In multi-dog households, harmony depends on **balance**.

When balance shifts, dogs don't explain it —
they react to it.

When to pause — and when to act

This situation often improves with calm management when:

When did you first notice it

- triggers are predictable
- tension can be managed through space and routine
- dogs settle when separated
- there are no injuries

It requires **professional input** when:

- fights repeat or escalate
- injuries occur
- fear or hypervigilance develops
- aggression appears sudden and uncharacteristic

As with other sudden behaviour changes, **ruling out discomfort or pain first** is essential — especially in older dogs.

The most important takeaway

Dogs don't fight because they forget how to get along.

They fight because:

Something in their world — or their body — no longer feels safe or manageable.

When did you first notice it

Understanding *when* that shift began is the first step toward restoring calm — not through force, but through clarity.

Situation 5

“My senior dog has become grumpy, reactive, or started guarding food.”

This change often takes owners by surprise.

A dog who was once tolerant may suddenly:

- growl when approached
- snap when touched
- guard food, treats, or resting places
- seem irritable or withdrawn
- react strongly to other pets

Owners often say:

- “He’s never done this before.”
- “She’s getting nasty in her old age.”
- “He’s always been gentle.”
- “I don’t recognise him anymore.”

When did you first notice it

Before trying to correct the behaviour, the most important question is:

When did this change begin — and what else was happening around that time?

Because in senior dogs, behaviour changes are very often linked to comfort.

Why this behaviour feels so upsetting

When a senior dog becomes reactive, it can feel like a loss.

Owners may experience:

- sadness
- guilt
- confusion
- fear of being bitten

It's easy to assume the dog's personality has changed.

In reality, senior dogs don't become difficult —

they become **less able to tolerate discomfort, pressure, or unpredictability.**

When did you first notice it

What senior “grumpiness” and guarding can actually signal

As dogs age, many changes happen quietly.

Common contributors include:

Pain or physical discomfort

Arthritis, dental pain, stiffness, or internal discomfort can lower tolerance and make touch or approach unpleasant.

Reduced sensory processing

Changes in hearing or vision can cause dogs to startle more easily and react defensively.

Cognitive changes

Confusion or reduced coping ability can increase irritability and anxiety.

Loss of resilience

Senior dogs often have less emotional and physical energy to cope with stressors they once managed easily.

When did you first notice it

Increased vulnerability around resources

Food, rest, and personal space may feel more important when energy is limited.

Guarding in seniors is often about **self-protection**, not dominance.

What owners often do that makes it worse

Out of concern or frustration, owners may:

- scold growling or snapping
- force handling to “show who’s boss”
- ignore warning signs
- assume the dog is being spiteful
- push the dog to tolerate more than they can

Unfortunately, these responses often:

- remove the dog’s ability to warn
- increase fear or defensiveness
- escalate reactions
- increase the risk of bites

When did you first notice it

Growling is not bad behaviour.

It is communication.

A calmer way to understand what's happening

Instead of asking:

“Why is my dog behaving like this?”

Ask:

- Could my dog be uncomfortable or in pain?
- Has my dog's tolerance changed with age?
- Are there specific triggers – touch, food, movement, proximity?
- Is my dog being asked to cope the way they did years ago?

In senior dogs, behaviour often changes **before** pain is obvious.

When to pause – and when to act

This situation often improves with thoughtful adjustment when:

- discomfort is identified and managed
- expectations are adjusted for age
- routines are predictable
- pressure around food and space is reduced

When did you first notice it

It requires **professional input** when:

- behaviour changes appear suddenly
- guarding escalates
- aggression is uncharacteristic
- confusion or disorientation appears
- pain or illness may be present

In senior dogs especially, **ruling out pain first is essential**, not optional.

The most important takeaway

Senior dogs are not becoming difficult.

They are becoming:

more vulnerable — and more honest about their limits.

When behaviour changes are met with understanding rather than correction, senior dogs often become calmer, not worse.

Situation 6

When did you first notice it

“My dog is eating poop — his own, other dogs’, or especially cat poop.”

This is one of the behaviours owners find the hardest to talk about.

It’s embarrassing.

It feels unhygienic.

And it often leads to panic, punishment, or desperate internet searches.

Owners commonly say:

- “It’s disgusting.”
- “I don’t understand why he does it.”
- “He’s well fed — how can this be normal?”
- “I’m scared something is wrong with him.”

Before trying to stop the behaviour, the most important question remains:

When did this start — and what changed around that time?

Because poop-eating almost never appears without a reason.

When did you first notice it

Why this behaviour triggers such a strong reaction

Humans interpret poop-eating through a human lens — hygiene, manners, and disgust.

Dogs don't.

For dogs, this behaviour is not about morals or defiance.

It's about **information, coping, and opportunity**.

The mistake many people make is reacting emotionally before understanding why the behaviour began.

What eating poop can actually signal

Poop-eating (coprophagia) can have several underlying drivers, and more than one may be present at the same time.

Common contributors include:

Stress or anxiety

Especially after routine changes, tension in the household, or conflict between animals.

When did you first notice it

Competition or insecurity

Seen in multi-pet homes, particularly around resources like food or attention.

Digestive discomfort or hunger cues

Not always about quantity of food — sometimes about absorption or satisfaction.

Age-related changes

Senior dogs may revisit behaviours they outgrew earlier in life as tolerance and processing change.

Environmental access

Cat litter trays, shared yards, or unsupervised areas create opportunity that reinforces the habit.

Poop-eating is often **self-reinforcing** — once it starts, it can become habitual even if the original cause has passed.

Why cat poop is especially appealing

Many owners are horrified that their dog seeks out cat feces in particular.

There are simple reasons for this:

When did you first notice it

- Cat food is often richer
- The smell and composition are highly attractive to dogs
- Litter trays are easily accessible

This does not mean the dog is “obsessed” or “gross”.

It means the opportunity exists — and the behaviour is rewarding.

What people often do that makes it worse

In an attempt to stop the behaviour, owners may:

- shout or punish the dog
- chase the dog away after the fact
- apply bitter sprays or additives inconsistently
- react strongly every time it happens

Unfortunately, these responses can:

- increase stress
- reinforce secrecy
- escalate anxiety
- turn the behaviour into a tense interaction rather than a solvable problem

When did you first notice it

As with many behaviours, pressure rarely leads to clarity.

A calmer way to understand what's happening

Instead of asking:

“How do I stop this?”

Ask:

- Did this begin during a stressful or transitional period?
- Has something changed in the household or routine?
- Is the dog coping differently than before?
- Is this dog older, more anxious, or less tolerant than he used to be?

Poop-eating is often a **symptom**, not a stand-alone problem.

Understanding *when* it started helps determine whether you're dealing with:

- stress
- habit
- insecurity
- discomfort
- opportunity

When did you first notice it

Each requires a different response.

When to pause — and when to act

This behaviour often improves with calm management when:

- the dog is otherwise relaxed and healthy
- the behaviour is situational
- access can be managed
- stressors are addressed

It deserves **professional input** when:

- it appears suddenly in an adult or senior dog
- it coincides with weight loss, digestive upset, or other behaviour changes
- anxiety or compulsive patterns are present
- nothing obvious has changed, but the behaviour persists

As with other sudden changes, **ruling out discomfort or digestive issues**

first is the most responsible place to start.

The most important takeaway

Dogs don't eat poop to upset their owners.

When did you first notice it

They do it because:

Something in their world — or their body — is asking them to cope differently.

When you understand *why* it started, you stop reacting to the behaviour and start responding to the cause.

That's where change becomes possible.

Situation 7

“My dog or cat has started marking inside the house.”

This is one of the behaviours owners find the most upsetting.

It feels deliberate.

It feels disrespectful.

And it often comes with embarrassment and frustration.

Owners commonly say:

When did you first notice it

- “He’s doing it on purpose.”
- “She’s never done this before.”
- “He knows better.”
- “I don’t understand why this suddenly started.”

Before reacting to the behaviour, the most important question is:

When did the marking start — and what changed around that time?

Because marking is rarely about training or stubbornness.

Why this behaviour triggers such a strong reaction

Indoor marking feels personal.

It’s often interpreted as:

- spite
- dominance
- territorial defiance
- “forgetting” the rules

From an animal’s perspective, marking is not about misbehaviour.

It is **communication**.

When did you first notice it

Dogs and cats mark to restore familiarity when their environment feels uncertain or unstable.

What marking can actually signal

Sudden indoor marking is commonly linked to **change**, not disobedience.

Common contributors include:

Environmental disruption

Moving house, renovations, rearranging spaces, or visitors can unsettle familiar scent patterns.

Social tension or competition

Changes in relationships between animals — even subtle ones — can trigger marking.

Loss of predictability

Routine changes, absence of household members, or increased stress can reduce a sense of security.

When did you first notice it

Age-related changes

Older animals may have reduced tolerance or coping ability, even if they were previously reliable.

Discomfort or medical issues

Urinary discomfort, pain, or illness can contribute, especially when marking appears suddenly.

Marking often appears when an animal is trying to **re-establish safety**, not challenge authority.

What owners often do that makes it worse

In response to marking, owners may:

- punish or scold
- clean with strong-smelling products
- confine the animal excessively
- increase tension around affected areas
- assume the behaviour is intentional

Unfortunately, these responses can:

When did you first notice it

- increase stress
- reinforce insecurity
- escalate marking
- damage trust

Punishment addresses the symptom —
not the reason the behaviour appeared.

A calmer way to understand what's happening

Instead of asking:

“How do I stop this?”

Ask:

- What changed in the environment before this began?
- Has something disrupted my pet's sense of familiarity or safety?
- Are there tensions, new scents, or changes in routine?
- Is my pet older or coping differently than before?

Marking is often the **last visible signal** of stress that started earlier.

When to pause — and when to act

This behaviour often improves with calm adjustment when:

When did you first notice it

- triggers can be identified
- routines are stabilised
- pressure and punishment are removed
- environmental stress is reduced

It requires **professional input** when:

- marking appears suddenly in an adult or senior animal
- it coincides with other behaviour changes
- urinary discomfort or illness is possible
- the behaviour escalates despite management

As with other sudden changes, **ruling out medical causes first** is essential — especially in cats.

The most important takeaway

Dogs and cats don't mark indoors because they forget where they live.

They mark because:

Something in their environment no longer feels settled or secure.

When did you first notice it

Understanding *when* that feeling began is the key to responding with clarity rather than frustration.

Situation 8

“Nothing is obviously wrong – but something feels off.”

This is often the hardest situation to explain.

There’s no single behaviour you can point to.

No clear incident.

No obvious trigger.

Just a quiet, persistent feeling that something isn’t quite right.

Owners often say:

- “He’s just not himself.”
- “She seems different lately.”
- “I can’t explain it – something feels off.”
- “I don’t know if I’m overthinking it.”

You’re not.

When did you first notice it

Before trying to interpret behaviour or look for solutions, the most important question remains:

When did you first notice that things felt different – and what was happening around that time?

Because this feeling rarely appears without a reason.

Why this situation is so easy to dismiss

When nothing is clearly “wrong”, it’s tempting to ignore the feeling.

Owners may:

- doubt themselves
- assume they’re imagining things
- wait for something more obvious to happen
- dismiss subtle changes as temporary

But animals often change **quietly** before problems become visible.

This stage is not uncertainty –

it’s **early information**.

When did you first notice it

What “something feels off” can actually signal

Subtle changes often reflect internal shifts rather than obvious behaviour problems.

Common contributors include:

Low-grade discomfort or pain

Pain doesn't always show as limping or crying. It often appears as subtle withdrawal, irritability, or reduced tolerance.

Reduced emotional resilience

Stress, aging, or cumulative changes can reduce a pet's ability to cope the way they once did.

Environmental or routine changes

Even small shifts — timing, presence, noise, or space — can affect animals more than people realise.

Cognitive or sensory changes

Changes in hearing, vision, or processing can alter how the world feels, even if behaviour hasn't dramatically changed yet.

When did you first notice it

Anticipation of stress

Animals often respond not to what is happening now, but to what they expect *might* happen.

This situation is often the **earliest warning sign**, not the least important one.

What owners often do that makes it worse

Because there's no clear problem, owners may:

- push for normal behaviour
- increase expectations
- ignore subtle signals
- wait until behaviour escalates

Unfortunately, waiting often means missing the opportunity to respond early and gently.

Small changes become bigger ones when they're not acknowledged.

A calmer way to understand what's happening

Instead of asking:

"What's wrong with my pet?"

When did you first notice it

Ask:

- What has changed recently — even subtly?
- Has my pet's tolerance, comfort, or confidence shifted?
- Is my pet being asked to cope the way they did before?
- Could this be an early sign of discomfort or stress?

This situation calls for **observation**, not urgency.

Understanding now often prevents crisis later.

When to pause — and when to act

This situation often benefits from calm observation when:

- changes are subtle
- the pet still functions normally
- there is no distress or danger
- routines can be stabilised

It deserves **professional input** when:

When did you first notice it

- changes persist or worsen
- behaviour begins to shift more noticeably
- tolerance decreases
- anxiety, withdrawal, or irritability appears

As always, when things feel “off”, **ruling out discomfort or pain first** is the most responsible place to start.

The most important takeaway

That quiet feeling matters.

Animals don't change without reason —
they just don't always announce it loudly.

When nothing is obviously wrong, but something feels different, it's often because:

Your pet is adjusting to a change you can't yet see.

Listening early allows you to respond with clarity instead of urgency —
and that is one of the most caring things an owner can do.

A Final Word

Understanding Is an Act of Care

If you've reached the end of this guide, it's likely because something about your dog or cat changed — and you wanted to understand it, not just stop it.

That matters.

Most behaviour problems don't become difficult because they are extreme. They become difficult because they are misunderstood.

When owners slow down and ask:

When did this begin?

What changed around that time?

What might my pet be responding to?

they often realise they're not dealing with a "bad" animal — they're dealing with a response to change.

You don't need to have all the answers immediately.

When did you first notice it

This guide was never meant to give certainty.

It was meant to give **orientation**.

To help you pause, notice patterns, and choose the right next step — calmly, thoughtfully, and without pressure.

Sometimes that next step is observation.

Sometimes it's adjustment.

Sometimes it's professional support.

Knowing *which* one matters far more than acting quickly.

Most dogs and cats are not difficult.

Most owners are not failing.

They are navigating change together.

Choosing to understand before fixing is one of the most caring decisions you can make.

When did you first notice it?

About This Guide

This guide was created from years of working closely with dogs, cats, and the people who care for them. It's shaped by real conversations, real questions, and the quiet moments where behaviour didn't make sense at first — until context was found.

No two animals are the same, and no single explanation fits every situation. What does help, again and again, is slowing down, noticing change, and understanding behaviour as communication rather than defiance.

If this guide helped you see your dog or cat a little more clearly, then it has done what it was meant to do. Understanding comes before fixing.

