

WAS IT OUT OF SPITE? THINK AGAIN!!!



Animals don't do things out of spite or malice. They are often bored, frightened, or need exercise!

Many animal guardians truly believe that their cat, dog, bird, rabbit, horse etc. does things "to them" out of spite or malice.

New Flash: **This is not true.** When we don't know *how or why* an animal behavior problem exists, we tend to make it about us; we personalize it. In the animal behavior world, this is referred to this as Anthropomorphism.

Anthropomorphism: Attributing human motivation, characteristics, or behavior to inanimate objects, animals, or natural phenomena



I need to be exercised. I am bored. I need to expend my energy elsewhere. I am not trying to be a jerk. Please help me, human.

Seven Things That We MUST Acknowledge!

1. Behavior Serves a Purpose.

Every behavior that an animal does serves a purpose to fit that animal's particular need at the time; that purpose is *not to upset us*. When we find urine or feces on purses, backpacks, clothing, bedding, etc. most people's first thought is usually that the cat or dog is doing it because he or she is mad or spiteful. Nothing could be further from the truth.

When your pet urinates or defecates on items in the house (your baby's diaper bag, your boyfriend's backpack, or your husband's uniform), it's not because they are jealous or spiteful. There could be a few reasons behind this. Unfamiliar scents in the home can be a stressor for our pets. Animals will "reaffirm" their claim on their territory by marking on a new item. Although we don't like it, this is a very normal animal behavior. When they mark (pee or defecate on them), they are claiming that that particular territory belongs to them. (Diaper bag and backpack = their turf).

I see you brought a new item into the house. I will pee on that new thing and it will become mine. I am now One with this item. Thank you.

Ok, so you still aren't convinced that animals are not acting like jerks just to upset us? Let's really think about this. If our companion animals peed and pooped out of spite or malice, that means they would have to understand and believe that urine and feces are "gross". That is our personal, human perception of urine and feces.

Science shows us that animals view feces and urine quite differently. To an animal, there is nothing gross about taking a nice fat dump, or a long steamy pee. In fact, urine and poop are absolutely fascinating to animals! That's [why they investigate another animal's urine and feces](#) to learn more about them!



Poop has a plethora of information!

2. Assigning Human Attributes to Animals Is a Big Mistake

Have *you* ever done anything out of spite? Think about what's involved. You have to do something *now* in order to upset somebody *later*. You also need detailed insight into what would upset the other person, even if that same thing wouldn't upset you. And you have to plan it out, because the Nasty Surprise isn't going to happen now, and might not happen for hours, days, or weeks later.

That's a *lot* of forethought for an animal.

This is what cognitive scientists call "[theory of mind](#)". It's the understanding that others have a viewpoint and perceptions all of their own, which might or might not be the same as yours. Theory of Mind is "the way somebody conceives of mental activity in others, including how children conceptualize mental activity in others and how they attribute intention to and predict the behavior of others." Experiments testing imitation, self-recognition, social relationships, deception, role-taking (or empathy), and perspective-taking help us to answer whether nonhuman animals have theory of mind. Results have been mixed; only some results show the possibility that animals demonstrate awareness of the mental states of others. I have my own personal beliefs about this. Almost every species I have worked with has demonstrated that they are self aware, but being spiteful and vengeful were not part of the equation.

So it's really a very far stretch to believe that your cat, dog, rabbit, or pig can think to him/herself, "I find urine and poop quite interesting and informative, but my people are totally grossed out when they find a steamy pile of it on the family room carpet. Hmmm. I think I will poop there just to see their reaction. I might even pee on their pillow. That will teach them to not leave me again."

Our animals are not plotting their revenge to get a reaction from you in the future! Their behavior is *not about YOU*.

Let's review this one more time:

Anthropomorphism: Attributing human motivation, characteristics, or behavior to inanimate objects, animals, or natural phenomena

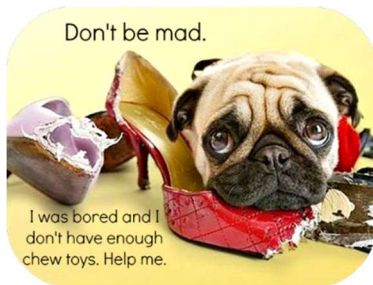
3. But They Look Sooooo Guilty!

I hear people say this all the time, “But they look and act guilty when I find the mess!”. Here’s the simple truth: If your parrot, horse, dog, or cat seems to look as if they know they did something wrong after they have shredded something to pieces, or if they have peed or pooped in an off-limits area, there is a very simple explanation; they have learned that wanton destruction or pooping and peeing in the house combined with the presence of their guardian equals bad things (punishment or scolding).

When our pup puts on that doleful, guilty look, they must be guilty of something, right? He/she clearly feels bad for doing something wrong! The truth is simply this: [when your dog knows that you are upset he/she will use various facial expressions and body postures \(their natural dog language with each other\) for you to settle down and therefore avoid punishment.](#)

A group of canine cognition researchers [created an experiment about the myth of guilt](#) that explained the behavior that we see in our dogs when they display that “guilty look”.

There is plenty of evidence for what scientists refer to as *primary emotions* – happiness and fear, for example – in animals. But empirical evidence for *secondary emotions* like jealousy, pride, and guilt, is extremely rare in the animal cognition literature. The argument usually given for this lack of evidence is that such secondary emotions seem to require a level of cognitive sophistication, particularly when it comes to self-awareness or self-consciousness, that may not exist in non-human animals. In other words, guilt is complicated.



Hey, if you left your things and they smell like you, they are going to get chewed. Don’t be angry. Prevent it next time by removing access to “unauthorized” chew things and provide appropriate toys!

4. Animals Are Not Human, but They Do Have Emotions.

Unfortunately, many of us have learned that *humans* can be vindictive and spiteful. However (but fortunately), this is not part of an animal’s nature. Their innocence and purity of heart is one of the many reasons that we adore them. But as you probably have learned for yourself, many of the animals we live with do not come with a clean slate. Many of them have emotional burdens. Many of them are sensitive to our emotions. Because of this, our companion animals can (and will) destroy or improperly eliminate due to underlying emotional reasons.

FACT: Anxiety is the most common emotional state underlying soiling in the house and destroying “our property”.

Anxiety is also the number one reason why **physical punishment should NEVER be used** for correcting behaviors. Can you imagine being stressed beyond belief that your human has left you, so you destroy something, and then your human comes home to scream at you, or hit you?

Punishment only creates more fear.

[Physical and mental punishment never helps the situation, and it certainly only makes behavior issues worse.](#)



This will continue to happen until you give me appropriate chew toys. I am bored. I have so much energy that needs to be released through healthy exercise. Help me.

5. Pets Are Not “Fur Kids”.

Ok, we all refer to our pets as “fur kids”, even I do sometimes, but **animals are not humans**. Animals have their very own specific environmental, mental, and physical needs that need to be met. When we treat them as if they are children, we are not recognizing what they inherently need to be happy and healthy in our home. Your dog, cat, rabbit, rat, pig, or parrot is not a child, nor should they be treated like one. We need to learn to see animals for who they are; a living being that has [species-specific needs](#).

Of course our pets have distinct personalities, and they are some of our greatest teachers, but they are not children. We do them a disservice when we don’t allow them to be a dog, a cat, or a parrot. When we label them, and put unrealistic expectations on them, we hinder them, and what they need to fully thrive in our home.



These clothes smell new. I think I will make them smell more like me by peeing on them. I am a cat. This is what we cats do.

6. If There Is a Behavioral Issue, *It’s Your Job to Figure Out Why*.

If your pet is house soiling or destroying “unauthorized items”, it’s your job as their guardian to figure out WHY. There is always a reason, and I promise it’s not to upset you. When we explain behaviors away by saying the animal is just “mad” at us or “being a jerk”, we are missing what’s really going on with our animal companions. **Your animal companion may need your HELP, instead of your anger and frustration.**

As their guardians, we need to learn to see their motivation behind the behavior. Ask yourself:

- **Is there a medical issue that needs to be addressed?**
- **Are they stressed from someone else, or another animal in the house?**
- **Is there something outside that is adding [stress](#)?**
- **Are they experiencing [separation anxiety](#)?**

- Are they bored?
- Do they need more mental and physical enrichment?



Animals will find things to chew if we do not provide appropriate ones.

7. There could be a medical or behavioral issue that needs to be addressed ASAP!

When someone contacts me to help them with a behavior issue that they are seeing in their pet, the first thing I ask is, “When is the last time you ___ had a medical exam? This is where we want to start. If there is a behavior issue, we need to rule out the possibility of underlying health issues. Health issues -in every species of animal- can directly affect their behavior.

If there is a confirmed clean bill of health by the veterinarian, then we can start to address the environment, and what might be creating the new, (undesirable) behaviors that they are seeing in their pet. This can be anything from their diet, to their “person”.

Here are some common possibilities for why your pet is doing what you might refer to as “naughty things” when you’re not home:

- They are climbing out of their skin with excess energy because h/she doesn’t receive enough exercise!
- They are not properly house trained.
- They are incontinent.
- They cannot hold their urine or feces for the long time that you are gone.
- Their litter box set up is All Wrong.
- They need more mental enrichment in their environment.
- They suffer from separation anxiety.
- They have C.C.D (canine compulsive disorder).
- They suffer from Feline Separation Anxiety
- There was a thunderstorm (or fireworks) that terrified them.
- Something else is scaring, frightening, or stressing them while you’re gone.
- They are bored and lonely.

- They don't have proper toys, approved chew things, or appropriate scratching posts to use.



If you had given me an appropriate cat scratching post, I wouldn't have done this to the couch. It was my only option.

So, what's the take home message here? Our animals are not plotting their revenge on us. They are not planning how to get back at us. They are not programmed the way humans are. So we must learn to recognize what is really going on with the animal that we have chosen to bring into our lives. Yes, "accidents" and mishaps happen in the house, but not because that's the animal's way of acting out and being "mad" at us. Please take the human perceptions and judgments out of the situation, and learn to view life from the animal's perspective. Help them! Find out what they need and what is causing their behavior. There is always a valid reason and explanation behind it, and *it's not about trying to upset us*.

"We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are." –Anais Nin