

From Butts to Bondings: How Dogs Use Scent to Connect

Do you often wonder why dogs sniff each other butts and private parts?

To understand, let's first look at how powerful a dog's sense of smell is and how they communicate. Like us, dogs have five basic neurological senses: touch, hearing, sight, taste, and smell. While humans rely primarily on vision to understand their environment, dogs use their sense of smell. A dog's ability to smell and sniff is far more advanced than that of humans. When dogs greet each other, they are using their sense of smell rather than vocalizations to transmit information. Dogs can gather so much more detailed information from scent than we can even imagine.

Just how good is a dog's sense of smell?

A dog's sense of smell, which is their strongest sense, is around 100,000 times more sensitive than that of humans. This is because their noses have 150 million smell receptors compared to just 5 million in humans. Certain breeds even exceed that, like a Blood hound, who has 300 million smell receptors! Dogs also dedicate about 30% of their brain to processing smells, while humans use only 5 % of our brains for this purpose.

Dogs can detect scents in parts per trillion, which means they pick up on things we can't. For instance, while we might smell a freshly baked apple pie as a combination of crust, apples, and cinnamon, our dogs would detect the individual ingredients, such as flour and eggs.

Dogs also have a special tool to aid their sense of smell called Jacobson's organ (or vomeronasal organ). Located in their nasal cavity, this organ helps them detect certain chemicals that we can't even smell. It allows them to pick up on pheromones, which provides information about another dog's mood, readiness to mate, or if they're a friend or foe.

Do dogs use smell to communicate?

When we meet someone new, we use facial expressions, tone of voice, and body language to understand them. Similarly, dogs use body language, but their sense of smell plays an important role in gathering information about other dogs. By sniffing, they can tell if the other dog is male or female, puppy or adult, happy or aggressive, and healthy or unwell. Some dogs like to leave their mark on trees and fire hydrants. It's sometimes referred to as "pee-mail." When another dog comes along, they can gather all the neighbourhood gossip by sniffing.

So, WHY do dogs sniff each other's butts?

This is a common question, as it seems odd to humans, but it's how dogs greet each other and gather vital information. Inside a dog's rectum are two small glands called anal glands which produce a strong-smelling substance. Dogs sniff this area to learn all kinds of information about

the other dog, such as whether they have met before, how the dog is feeling, and who might be the more assertive dog.

Dogs can set the tone for their relationship by how they sniff each other. The more assertive dog usually sniffs first, while the more submissive dog may wait their turn or move away sooner. Sometimes a dog may sit down to hide their scent and limit the information they give out.

Dogs have excellent scent memory and, just by smell, can recognize other dogs they haven't seen in years. When dogs in the same family are reunited after being apart, they use their noses to catch up on where the other has been and what they've been doing.

Sniffing each other's butts isn't just about communication, though. It can also be a calming, stress-relieving ritual for dogs. So, the next time you see dogs sniffing each other's butts, remember they're just saying hello in their own special way. It's like shaking hands and getting to know each other.

So now you are aware dogs' primary sense is their nose and it's how they navigate their environment and greet friends. Preventing your dog from exploring the world through their sense of scent would be like putting a blindfold on a human. Giving your dog the chance to smell provides them with valuable information and stimulates them mentally.

On their walks, give them lots of opportunities to sniff the world, greet other dogs and have a little "sniffari." If you want to balance sniffing time with walking, teach them clues like "leave it" or "let's go" when you're ready to move on. Use sniffing time as a reward after some nice loose-leash walking. Teach the "go sniff" cue when you reach a tree or fire hydrant, so your dog knows it's okay to explore with their nose.

By giving your dog opportunities to explore their world through scent, you're not only allowing them to engage in natural behaviours, but also providing them with mental stimulations and a deeper connection to both their environment and other dogs. So, the next time you're out for a walk, let your dog take the lead with their nose and enjoy the journey of discovery together. You might gain a new appreciation for how your dog experiences the world!



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