

Dear Dr. Doug,

My dog Baxter is always sniffing other dog's butts. Why does he keep doing that, and is there a way to stop it? Thanks, Matt

Humm. Some people say that question may stink, but I find it to be a very good question. Mainly, dogs sniff each others butts as a major way to communicate with each other. The American Chemical Society refers to it as chemical communication. Dogs have 10,000 to 100,000 times better smell than people...actually dogs have around 225 million olfactory receptors as compared to people who have only about 5 million. Dogs also have an extra smelling mechanism in their nose known as Jacobson's Organ that is more of a chemical detector than a smell detector. This organ can take those pheromones that dogs secrete directly to the brain. It helps sort out those other foul poop smells so dogs can hasten their communication. There are also special glands near a dog's anus known as the anal sacs that secrete all these smells and pheromones that dogs are searching for. I like to refer to it as their mobile Facebook Page. Instant info. By sniffing these glands, they can tell rather quickly whether the other dog is male or female, what his recent meals were, or even his or her emotional state (are they afraid of each other, stressed out by loud noise, etc.). It can also be a sign of dominance or submissiveness or a sign of equality, depending on who sniffs first, and who allows the sniffing to continue. Each dogs' smells are different from each other too, similar to our fingerprints. Kevin Behan, a Vermont dog trainer and author says sniffing can even have a calming effect on some dogs...hummmmm. So, as far as trying to stop Baxter from doing it, no, let him go. It's normal behavior, and if you keep pulling him away, the other dog may be threatened by it, and then a fight may break out. So be patient, and let 'em sniff. He's just communicating. Hope that helps Matt, and now you "nose".

Dr. Doug