

When did you first notice it?

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



When Did You First Notice It?

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

This short guide is a starting point. It's designed to help you pause, notice patterns, and begin asking better questions — not to give instant answers or quick fixes.

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 isn't the behaviour itself — it's not knowing **why**.

This guide was written for that moment.

When did you first notice it

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

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.

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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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’s normal — and it doesn’t mean you missed something important.

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?

Small routine shifts often matter more than big events.

When did you first notice it

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

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
- Grooming routines or products

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

When did you first notice it

Health and travel events

- Car accidents or near misses
- Long drives or stressful trips
- Funerals, weddings, or emotional gatherings

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.

A Common Situation: When Something Feels “Off”

“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

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.

Reduced emotional resilience

Aging can reduce a pet's ability to cope.

Environmental or routine changes

Even small shifts can affect animals more than people realise.

Cognitive or sensory changes

Changes in hearing, vision, or processing can alter how the world feels,

When did you first notice it

What owners often do that makes it worse

Because there's no clear problem, owners may:

- push for normal behaviour
- increase expectations

A calmer way to understand what's happening

Instead of asking:

“What's wrong with my pet?”

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?

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

When did you first notice it

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 Thought

This guide was never meant to give certainty. It was meant to offer orientation. To help you slow down, notice patterns, and choose your next step calmly, thoughtfully, and without pressure.

Sometimes that next step is observation. Sometimes it's a small 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. If this guide helped you pause, ask better questions, or notice something you hadn't connected before, then it has already done its job.

You don't need to have all the answers yet. You just need to keep paying attention.

What this guide does not do

🐾 It does not diagnose

🐾 It does not replace professional assessment

🐾 It does not tell you what to change yet

If you're ready to understand what the changes you noticed may be telling you, the full guide walks you through clear, step by step process.

When did you first notice it

Ready for the step-by-step clarity?

Get the full guide

This starter guide helps you observe clearly. The full guide helps you understand patterns and choose the right next step with confidence.

Before you close this Guide

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 challenges 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 "problem animal" — they're responding to change.

This guide is a starting point. It helps you observe, organise your thoughts, and decide what comes next — calmly. If, as you read, you found yourself thinking "this goes deeper than I realised", you're not wrong.

Some situations simply need more space, structure, and guidance than a short guide can offer.

When you're ready, that support exists. For now, you've already done something important: You chose understanding before fixing. That is one of the most caring decisions an owner can make.

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