

Shih Tzu Behavior: What's Normal—and



When to Be Concerned

Shih Tzus are affectionate, expressive little dogs with big personalities packed into small bodies. Originally bred as companion dogs for Chinese royalty, their behaviors are deeply rooted in their purpose: to love, to be close, and to charm their humans.

But how do you know what's normal Shih Tzu behavior—and what might be a sign something's wrong?

Let's break it down.

Typical Shih Tzu Behaviors (Perfectly Normal!)

Velcro-Dog Tendencies

Shih Tzus love being near their people. Following you from room to room, sitting at your feet, or curling up beside you is completely normal.

Why it happens:

They were bred purely for companionship, not hunting or guarding.

When it's normal:

- They settle when you're home
- They're content resting nearby

Playful Bursts (a.k.a. Zoomies)

Sudden bursts of energy—running, spinning, or playful bouncing—are common, especially in puppies and young adults.

Why it happens:

They're releasing pent-up energy or excitement.

Tip:

Short daily play sessions help balance these bursts.



Lots of Sleeping

Shih Tzus are champions of rest. Sleeping 12–16 hours a day (especially for adults) is normal.

Normal signs:

- Active when awake
- Eats and drinks normally
- Interested in play or walks

Alert Barking

They may bark when someone knocks, a door opens, or something unfamiliar happens.

Normal barking:

- Short bursts

- Stops once reassured

Affection on Their Terms

Some Shih Tzus love cuddles all day; others prefer short snuggle sessions.

Totally normal:

- Wanting affection, then space
- Being more attached to one person

Behaviors That Can Be Normal—but Need Monitoring

Stubbornness

Shih Tzus are intelligent but independent thinkers.

Common signs:

- Selective listening
- Ignoring commands they definitely know

What helps:

- Positive reinforcement
- Short, fun training sessions
- Consistency (they test boundaries!)

Possessiveness

They may guard toys, food, or favorite people.

Mild possessiveness:

- Growling without escalation
- Stiff posture near valued items

Early training is key to prevent this from becoming problematic.

Mild Separation Anxiety

Some Shih Tzus dislike being alone and may whine or pace.

Often normal if:

- Happens briefly after you leave
- Improves with routine and reassurance

Behaviors That Are Not Normal (and Should Be Addressed)

Sudden Aggression

Snapping, biting, or intense growling—especially if new—should never be ignored.

Possible causes:

- Pain or illness
- Fear or trauma
- Lack of socialization

 Action: Consult a vet or professional trainer.

Excessive Barking

If barking is constant, uncontrollable, or paired with anxiety:

May indicate:

- Stress
- Boredom
- Fear

Destructive Behavior

Chewing furniture, tearing items, or scratching doors excessively is not typical for adult Shih Tzus.

Often linked to:

- Anxiety
- Too much alone time
- Lack of mental stimulation

Major Personality Changes

A normally friendly dog becoming withdrawn, fearful, or irritable is a red flag.

Always rule out medical issues first.

Supporting Healthy Shih Tzu Behavior

- ✓ Daily affection and companionship
- ✓ Gentle, positive training
- ✓ Mental stimulation (toys, puzzles, short walks)

✓ Predictable routines

✓ Regular vet checkups

A well-supported Shih Tzu is a happy, confident companion.

Final Thoughts

Shih Tzus may be small, but their emotions and personalities are big. Understanding what's normal helps you respond with patience, compassion, and confidence—and ensures your dog feels safe, loved, and understood.

When in doubt, trust your instincts. You know your dog best. 🐶💙