

94 Dog Behavior Problems – Greeting Behavior

Door Charging

My dog charges the door whenever someone knocks or rings the bell. What can I do?

Door charging and uncontrollable excitement when visitors arrive is extremely disconcerting and potentially dangerous. Without proper control of your dog he could charge out the door and into the street where he might get injured. If this behavior is also accompanied by aggressive responses such as aggressive barking, growling, snarling, lunging, snapping or biting, you should seek the guidance of a veterinary behaviorist since this presents risks to those who enter your home. With or without aggressive responses, until you can change the dog's behavior, he must be securely confined before you answer the door. This could be in another room, behind an inescapable barricade or closed door, in a crate or by an adult holding the dog on a leash (preferably with a head halter for additional control). See (66) Training Products – Head Halter Training and (67) Training Products – Head Halter Training – Synopsis.

“Start by teaching the dog to ‘sit’ and ‘stay’ for a food reward in the entry area.”

To deal with door charging which has not yet proceeded to aggression, start by teaching the dog to 'sit' and 'stay' for a food reward in the entry area. If the dog cannot sit and settle at the door without distractions, you should not expect to be able to control the dog when the door is opened or when visitors arrive. Training is likely to be most successful and most effective if you utilize a head collar and leash. It may help to use a mat or rug to designate the proper place for the dog to relax and settle for training. As the dog learns to achieve/maintain a relaxed sit or down-stay or settle on a mat (see (61) Teaching Calm – Settle and Relaxation Training) you should be able to walk to the door, touch the doorknob or even open the door without the dog moving. If the reward is sufficiently motivating the dog should soon look forward to staying in place each time you practice approaching and opening the door. Gradually phase out food treats when the behavior is learned and can be reliably repeated. If barking is a big part of the problem you also should work on controlling barking (see (82) Barking and Training “Quiet” and (83) Barking and Training “Quiet” – Synopsis).

“Always require your dog to ‘sit’ before it gets petted.”

Each time you leave the house, also be certain to practice training calm doorway behaviors. If you are taking your dog for a walk, teach him to sit and settle before leaving the house and have him follow you on a controlled walk as you leave. If your dog is staying home when you leave and he begins to get excited or anxious, teach him to lie quietly on his bed or mat, and reward this behavior with a stuffed food toy or special chew, before walking out the door. Next you may need to practice getting the desired response with people entering the home. Begin with family members. First have them enter while the door is open so they can be seen. Next have them ring the bell while the door is open and then enter. Finally try with the door closed. Each time, get the dog to sit and stay or perform a settled down. Also practice proper greeting behaviors by having your dog sit quietly (or even give a paw) before the special treat or petting is given. Again a head halter can help to ensure that the desired behavior is achieved before rewards are given. By closing the door, then re-entering and greeting the dog multiple times in the same session, your dog's excitement level should gradually decrease, making it progressively easier to accomplish a proper greeting. Another option is to have the dog stay on its mat as you open the door and enter, and then bring the dog in a controlled walk out where it should be taught to greet by sitting quietly for a treat and petting. Once your dog has mastered arrivals and greetings with family members, proceed to other friends and family members with whom your dog is familiar.

Use a leash and head halter until the right behavioral response (sit/down/mat) is achieved, and give favored food rewards to ensure a positive outcome. Always require your dog to “sit” before it gets petted and you can go a long way to eliminating jumping behavior (see (95) Greeting Behavior – Jumping Up).