

95 Dog Behavior Problems – Greeting Behavior

Jumping Up

How can I prevent my dog from jumping up on others and me?

For many dogs, jumping up on people is part of their greeting routine. Often, owners have tried to discourage this behavior using methods such as squeezing the front feet, stepping on the dog's toes, or kneeling the dog in the chest. Yet the behavior continues. For some dogs, these techniques provide an uncomfortable but acceptable form of attention. For others, the technique leads to increasing anxiety as people arrive at the door, and conflict behaviors such as circling or urine leaking can develop because the pet is motivated to greet as well as avoid. Therefore, in both cases, the problem is gradually being further aggravated. If that is the case with your dog, then it is important to think about what might be motivating the dog to jump up and what is the reinforcement for the behavior continuing, and to avoid exposure until you can gain sufficient control with verbal commands, head halter training, or both.

Some people like to allow the dog to jump up on them from time to time. You must never allow the dog to choose the time or the dog will continue to do this behavior whenever it is in the mood, and could learn to greet all people in the same uncontrolled manner. Therefore, if you enjoy this type of greeting first teach your dog to settle and relax for greetings and then teach your dog a command “give me a hug” or “come up here.” This way, you have the behavior under verbal control and you decide when the dog will be allowed to jump up.

Why does my dog jump up?

Usually the motivation for the jumping up behavior is to greet people. Many dogs like to greet “face to face,” like they do with their canine counterparts. Some people, however, find this objectionable. Dogs that jump up can also cause injury or scare the visitor. The visitor's reaction to the dog (whether it be fear or retaliation) would then serve to make the dog anxious about further visitors coming to the home.

In addition, strong punitive responses when people enter the home can create anxiety and could make the dog aggressive as he anticipates that people entering the home create an aversive situation for him. The focus should not be on how to stop jumping up but rather to teach your dog how to greet properly for rewards.

How do I teach my dog to greet properly?

Training should likely begin at any time the dog is seeking attention, since any time attention soliciting behavior is reinforced, more intensive forms of this behavior are likely to be learned. Therefore, whenever your dog seems to want affection or anything of value, first teach it to sit and stay or lie down and settle, (which would both be proper greeting behaviors). In addition, sit/stay or down and settle training should be practiced in a variety of locations throughout the home, whenever the dog wants something of value e.g., food, toy, affection, treat, or walk (see (56) Learn to Earn – Predictable Rewards). These training commands should also become part of routine training sessions using food lures, head halter or clicker training (see (66) Training Products – Head Halter Training, (67) Training Products – Head Halter Training – Synopsis, and (18) Clicker and Target Training).

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Proceed to practice the sit/stay or down-settle in a variety of places around the home including the front doorway. If the dog is not immediately command responsive, a head halter can be used to more immediately and regularly achieve the desired response. Once the sit/stay or down-settle can be reliably achieved at the doorway, when there are no people coming or going, its time to begin practicing with family members, before progressing to familiar visitors and then to greeting new people arriving at the home. Make the dog sit and stay or lie in a settle down when people arrive and give the dog the special training treat. If the dog gets up, then put him back in the sit or down and try again until the dog remains settled through the arrival. Often, placing a treat jar by the front door with a bell on it will help. Once the dog associates the bell on the jar with a treat, and a treat with a sit/stay, the dog will be more likely to perform the task. For the dog that will reliably go to bed or a mat on command, an alternative option might be to use this command when people arrive at the door. Once the people have entered, you can bring the dog out on a leash and head halter to keep it under control.

Another way to train this behavior, if you feel that you have sufficient control, is to set up visitors to come to your home. You will likely have the best control of your dog if you use a head collar and a leash for this exercise. Have the first person come to the door. Instruct your dog to “sit” and “stay.” Then, let the visitor in. Hopefully, your dog will remain in the sit for rewards, and this can be followed by the visitor giving rewards. If the dog does not remain sitting, a pull up and forward with the head halter should return the dog immediately to a sit. After the dog has settled and received a treat from both you and the visitor, you might have them leave again through the back door, come to the front and enter again. This second entry should go easier as your dog will have just seen the person. If you can repeat this four to six times for each visitor, the dog will have plenty of opportunity to learn the new task.

I have tried training a new task, but my dog still jumps on people. Why?

Once you understand the motivation, and have trained a new task, you need to be sure you have identified all the reinforcement for the behavior. If the dog succeeds in getting any attention for the jumping behavior, then the dog will continue to jump. Attention includes petting, pushing away, (which resembles play behavior), and even mild reprimands, all of which can be reinforcing for a dog that really wants attention. To change this behavior you need to remove ALL reinforcement. This may mean that you do not look, speak, touch or interact with the dog IN ANY WAY when it jumps on you. Walk by the dog, give a command such as “sit,” but do not interact with the dog. Alternately, you could try a disruptive stimulus to see if you can disrupt the behavior just as it begins.

How can I train my dog not to jump using a disruptive stimulus?

To use disruption for jumping up, you need to be able to **quickly and humanely** interrupt the behavior. This is often best done with some type of device that makes a loud noise. Shaker cans, ultrasonic trainers, rape alarms, and air horns, all make loud noises that will often startle the dog. As soon as the dog hesitates, you need to give the dog an alternative command so that the dog can do the proper thing, and then reward the dog with praise. So, as you administer the noise, you say “sit” and when the dog sits, you reward it with praise and food treats if available. Many dogs soon learn that, to avoid the noise, they need to sit and will do so to greet you. Then have the person leave, and re-enter the home. Use the device and command if the dog does not immediately sit, and reinforce with a “good sit” and reward as soon as the dog

does sit. Continue to have the person leave and re-enter until the dog sits for its reward without hesitating. Another efficient but costly means of immediate interruption is to use a citronella spray collar. Bark activated collars are useful if the dog also barks as people arrive at the door. Alternately a remote collar can be used to interrupt the jumping and reinforce the desirable response (e.g., sitting).

Another method that is consistently successful at deterring and preventing the jumping up is to leave a leash and head halter on the dog during greeting. All it takes is stepping on the leash or a quick sharp pull to prevent or disrupt the jumping up. Again, be certain to reward non-jumping behavior.