

Dogs Jumping on People

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Jumping dogs are often considered ill-mannered and unpleasant to be around. More importantly, the jumping dog can cause real physical harm, especially to small children, elderly people, or pregnant women. This behavior makes the dog a social menace and often dooms the poor animal to being isolated away when guests arrive.

The primary reason dogs jump on people is to get attention. It is a bold, excited, friendly "Hello." Another reason is that it is a body language expression of social dominance over another individual. This behavior can often be seen between dogs when they play with each other.

"An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." The quickest, easiest way to a trained dog is to never give them the opportunity to do the wrong thing. Every time the mistake occurs, the dog is learning, "I can do this." So, the ideal approach is to intervene before the dog jumps.

The best approach to solving the friendly type of jumping is to teach a positive alternative for getting the attention they crave, such as sitting. These are often sweet, innocent dogs that know of no other way to get noticed. It is unlikely that they have been inadvertently rewarded while engaging in this socially unacceptable behavior.

Teaching the sit greeting is easier and quicker to accomplish than one might imagine. To begin, have a supply of treats hidden in a hand. As the dog approaches, hold a treat low, so his nose will target on it before he has the opportunity to jump. As soon as he touches the hand with the hidden treat, move it back over his head, as if trying to make his eyes cross. This motion will cause his head to move up and back, luring him into a sit. The instant he sits, give the treat, and immediately bend down and enthusiastically greet him, eye to eye. Repeat this several times, with consistent good timing.

When I demonstrate this technique, my students are usually amazed at how quickly their dog gets the idea. After three or four times of luring the approaching dog to sit and rewarding, I test them by standing tall and greeting enthusiastically. Most dogs come and promptly sit. Their owners say, "I can't believe it! Is that my dog?"

For the dominant or persistent jumper, it is necessary to make the jumping consistently unpleasant. If the dog is sensitive, quickly step back as they jump so as to avoid contact. For the average dog, quickly move a knee forward to tap them in the chest while gruffly saying, "Off!" This can be escalated to an actual thump in the chest paired with a more startling verbal correction for the stubborn, dominant, or insensitive dog.

Always gear the level of correction to the dog in question by reading the dog's response. If the correction did not work, do it harder or try something else. If it upset him, be more gentle. Constantly repeating an ineffective correction will only make the dog less sensitive and contaminate the relationship, without changing the unpleasant behavior. The emphasis should be on making the dog instantly glad when he does the right thing, so he will know that behavior pays. Also make the incorrect behavior consistently unpleasant, thus discouraging it.