

*Our dog is a terrible jumper? How do we get him to stop? Help!*

What you need to know is that jumping is a learned behavior. Dogs jump to solicit attention and usually they are very successful. Behavior that is rewarded gets stronger and your dog is being rewarded with attention. Even if it's negative attention (yelling "GET DOWN"), it's still attention. Although I don't recommend it, you can try punishing the behavior. Some people suggest kneeling the dog, using a squirt bottle or pinching the dogs front paws; the list goes on and on. The problem is that although these techniques may teach the dog not to jump on you (because you're not safe to jump on) your dog will continue to jump on everyone else. So if you don't want to punish, how do you stop the dog from jumping?

First you must stop the dog from rehearsing the unwanted behavior. You need to manage your dog so that he doesn't have the opportunity to jump on people and you need to be consistent about it. If your dog is allowed to jump on people sometimes and not others, you now have your dog on what trainers call a variable schedule of reinforcement. It's the same principle behind the slot machines in Las Vegas. The reason that people sit at those machines for hours on end is that they don't know when the pay off will come so they keep pulling those handles in hope of hitting it big. To extinguish behavior, you must prevent the behavior from being reinforced at all. To help manage your dogs' jumping, you can have your dog drag a leash in the house so that you can access him quickly when visitors come to the house. You can grab the leash and hold onto it so that the dog cannot make contact with your guests.

At the same time you are managing the behavior, you will need to teach an alternative behavior that is incompatible with jumping. With problem behaviors you need to stop thinking in terms of what you don't want your dog to do and start to think in terms of what you DO want your dog to do. Parents know that when they bring small children out to dinner at a nice restaurant they cannot expect for the kids not to get bored. Games are packed and coloring books are available so that when kids do start to get antsy, there is something acceptable for them to do. In other words, don't run around and disturb the other patrons but DO color in your books. Coloring is incompatible with running around. Along those same lines, you must teach your dog a behavior to replace jumping. Sitting is a behavior that is incompatible with jumping. Your dog cannot jump and sit at the same time. If you teach a dog to default to a sit whenever people are around it will eliminate the problem of jumping.

To begin working on this, you will first need to establish an area to tether your dog where people come into your home. One solution is an eyebolt mounted into the baseboard near the door with a carabineer hooked through it that you can quickly hook the leash to it when people come in. If you don't feel comfortable with that, you can simply tie the leash to a step railing or loop the handle over a door handle. Have some really good treats on hand: bits of chicken, cheese or

hotdog. Whatever you use, it needs to be cut into very small pieces and soft enough to be consumed quickly.

With the dog tethered and your guest just outside of the dog's reach, begin to reward any behavior that is not jumping. You can reward sits, four feet solidly on the floor (without the dog lunging) or downs. Remember the more excited the dog is the harder it will be initially to rein his behavior in. The proximity of the guest will also be a factor in how successful your dog is; the closer they are, the harder it will be. You may have to move them away from the dog initially if you are not having success. At first you are reinforcing any incremental improvement but over time you are going to want to teach the dog to sit for longer and longer periods. The end goal is a dog that can sit politely throughout an entire interaction with a human. To do this you must raise your criteria slowly enough so that you are getting reliability and not sloppiness. How can you do this?

The model I use was borrowed from trainer Jean Donaldson. In this model, ask for 5 trials of a particular behavior. If the dog is successful four or five times out of five, you will "push" the criteria (make it harder), if the dog is successful two or three times out of five, then you will "stick" (do another five reps with the criteria exactly the same) or if the dog is successful less than two times out of five repetitions you will "drop" the criteria (make it easier).

Here's an example: Your starting goal is that your dog will sit/stay for three seconds with your guest 3 feet away. To begin, ask your dog to sit (you needn't ask the dog to "stay"; I want that to be automatic in this context of greeting people). When the dog sits, start your count to three. If the dog stays in a sit for three seconds, toss a treat to the dog and count that as one success, if the dog gets up during the count, don't correct the dog, simply count that as one failure. Repeat this exercise five times and then assess where to go to next. Do you push it? Do you stick it? Do you drop it? If it's push, maybe you will want the dog to sit for 7 seconds, if it's stick, use the same criteria, if it's drop, maybe the dog has to stay in a sit for only 1 second. Here's a possible progression:

Person is 3 feet away

1. Sit for 3 seconds
2. Sit for 5 seconds
3. Sit for 7 seconds

Person moves a step or two closer (relax all other criteria)

1. Sits for 1 second
2. Sit for 3 seconds
3. Sit for 5 seconds
4. Sit for 7 seconds

Person moves right next to the dog (relax all other criteria)

1. Sits for 1 second
2. Sit for 3 seconds
3. Sit for 5 seconds

Work with the dog for no more than five minutes and then put him away. Don't expect that you will be able to do an extended training session each time you have a visitor, however if your guests are willing spend some time helping you to "train" your dog (and I find that most people are thrilled to help), this will enable your dog to start to begin to generalize this behavior to all of your visitors and not just one or two.

It is a problem that can be resolved but it will take time and effort on your part. Remember the longer the behavior has been rehearsed, the longer it will take. Unfortunately there is no such thing as a quick fix but with effort you will see your dog go from problem pup to a well mannered companion.