

How to Stop Your Dog From Jumping

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I don't like it when dogs jump on me. I can't tell you why it bothers me so much, it just does. Interestingly, nuisance jumping is a common complaint from owners as well.

Most often, dogs are jumping for attention. Dogs who are overly anxious, such as those with separation anxiety, may also jump even when the owner is ignoring them.

Don't make jumping more than it is. It is not an effort to dominate you or lead your pack. First, domestic dogs don't form packs, so you are not a pack member. Second, dogs generally don't want to run the world. Nope, no visions of grandeur. They simply want attention from you. That is it, plain and simple. The dog is trying to get you to give her attention. If you are a dog, it's natural to want to be up near the hands or face of someone who may pet you. Third, dogs don't try to dominate each other by jumping up to lick each other's faces.

Unfortunately, owners generally do pet dogs when they jump up. This reinforces (rewards) the behavior, making it more likely to occur again. To the dog, any type of attention can be considered reinforcement. This includes pushing her away and yelling at her. Through basic positive reinforcement (there's the science of learning again), we have trained our dogs to jump on us starting in puppyhood. Once again, it is not the dog's fault.

Take the following, common example: When first adopted, the puppy jumps on you. You bend down to pet her. While this is fine when the puppy is 10 pounds, it's not nearly as enjoyable when she's 100 pounds. Then, when the puppy gets a bit larger and is in adolescence, the jumping becomes annoying. You try different methods, such as ignoring her, kneeling her or yelling at her. She continues to jump. Making it even more difficult for your dog to learn what is appropriate, there are inconsistencies within the family regarding how they interact with the puppy. Some people pet her when she jumps up and some yell at her. Finally, there are invariably inconsistencies between what family members and visitors do.

This is very confusing to the puppy. She can't be sure what type of behavior is appropriate. The scientific term for these types of interactions is variable reinforcement. Variable reinforcement means sometimes the pup is rewarded and sometimes she is not. Believe it or not, this kind of reinforcement is the most powerful kind you can apply to a behavior. You read that right. You are actually making the behavior stronger by sometimes punishing and sometimes reinforcing. What results is a very persistent jumper!

To understand variable reinforcement better, consider the example of a person at a casino. This person might leave the roulette table after losing 2 or 3 times, but will sit at a slot machine for eight hours. Why do they do that? Because the slot machine employs variable reinforcement. The slot machine delivers small rewards intermittently throughout the day. There are enough rewards, statistically, to keep the person playing all day. There's even the promise of a possible huge jackpot at some point during the day.

Teaching pups not to jump is pretty simple~ ignore the pup when she is jumping and teach her an alternate way to get attention.

Follow these simple tips and your dog will be asking for attention politely in no time.

1. Do not knee, kick, or yell at her when she jumps on you.
2. Ask your puppy to sit for every bit of attention she gets. All of the time.
3. If she's jumping on you, walk away from her and completely ignore her. Don't even make eye contact. When she stops jumping on you, ask her to sit. Then, reward her with petting, praise and/ or treat.
4. When you praise your pup for sitting for attention, make sure to keep your praise calm and cool. It's not fair to the pup if you get extremely excited praising her while asking her to stay under control.
5. Like any other behavior, you will see the most improvement of everyone in the pup's world follows the same plan.
6. Until you get your pup's jumping under control, you can try distraction techniques like tossing small treats off to the side, or tossing a toy when you come through the front door.