

Jumping for Joy — *Teaching not to jump up when greeting*

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For dogs that jump up when greeting, a variety of dog training texts recommend the owner shout at the dog, squirt it in the face with water or lemon juice, swat it on the nose with a rolled-up newspaper, yank on the dog's lead, hang the dog by its choke collar, squeeze the dog's front paws, tread on its hind paws, knee it in the chest or flip it over backwards.

Surely this is all a little excessive for a dog that is only trying to say hello. Confucius say, "No need to use an ax to remove a fly from the forehead of a friend." Why not just train the dog to sit or lie down when greeting people?

Etiology of Jumping

Dogs jump up for a variety of reasons. First and foremost, most dogs have been unintentionally trained to jump up since puppyhood. When the young pup jumped and pawed, most people rewarded the dog by patting it on the head because they were too lazy to bend down to puppy level. Then one day the dog dutifully jumped up to greet its owner, who in turn greeted the friendly critter with a bonk on the nose or a knee in the chest. The dog's only crime was that it increased in size.

Pawing, licking and jumping up are all friendly appeasement gestures – the dog's way of saying, "Welcome home. Pleased to see you. Please don't beat me, I'm just a lowly worm compared with you, most honored human!" So what does the most honored human do? Punish the dog for jumping up. Now the dog has two reasons to show deference – the initial reason and the fact that it now has to appease an angry owner.

And how does it try to appease the owner? By pawing, licking and jumping up! This is one of the many paradoxes in training: The more one punishes the dog, the more frequent the behavior.

Counter conditioning

A simple solution would be to reward/train the dog to sit-stay when greeting people. Rather than try to extinguish complicated social behaviors with punishment, it is easier to employ a simple counter conditioning procedure and train the dog to perform an alternate and acceptable behavior which is mutually exclusive to the problem behavior (the dog cannot sit and jump up at the same time).

Counter conditioning measures sound simple, and they are -- in theory. But it can be a little more challenging to put theory into practice. Indeed, for many dogs, the word "uncontrollable" is a kindly euphemism for their behavior when greeting people. At such times, most dogs are so excited and distracted that they fail to acknowledge the owner's very existence, let alone an obedience command to "sit."

Troubleshooting

It is extremely difficult to counter condition Rover in the course of everyday life. The solution is to *troubleshoot* the problem: to set aside a specific time to teach the dog how it is expected to behave when greeting people.

Once the owner has taught Rover to sit using a lure-reward training method, the command should be especially proofed in the front hallway or wherever the dog normally greets people. Rover may be additionally trained to sit in a specific place, like on a mat. With one owner watching the dog in a sit-stay on its mat, another owner (or friend) should open and close the front door and repeatedly ring the doorbell. If we are going to expect the dog to sit when greeting people, we must make sure that the dog at least knows how to sit-stay in similar but less distracting circumstances.

Owner's Return

First, the difficult part: On returning home, the owner should instruct her dog to sit (or lie down) on its mat and delay greeting the dog until it does so. If good Rover sits, the owner should praise the dog to excess. If bad Rover does not sit, the owner should keep trying and do what it takes -- keep hold of the dog's collar and repeat the command until the dog complies.

This is no more difficult than dealing with the dog in everyday situations, only this time the owner will persevere and, eventually, the dog *will* sit. Other reprimands and punishments are neither necessary nor advisable, since they generally make the dog more excited. Rover will soon learn that it has to sit *before* the owner will deign to say hello. As soon as the dog sits, the owner should immediately greet Rover with gentle pets, pats, profuse praise and a couple of treats.

Now comes the easy part. Once the dog's exuberance has waned, the owner should slip out of the house by the back door, drive around the block and then return home once more, whereupon the owner should *request* Rover to go to the appropriate position: Sit on its mat. This time the owner will find that it is much, much easier to get Rover to sit. The dog is not nearly as excited by the owner's return, because he or she only just left. After greeting the dog the second time, the owner should leave and repeat the procedure for a third time, then a few more times. Rover's performance will improve with each repetition.

With repeated exposures to the same stimulus complex, the dog becomes less and less excited and progressively easier to control. Moreover, the initial improvement is dramatic. Once Rover's performance is impeccable, the owner should repeat the departure/arrival sequence another half a dozen or so times in order to leave an utterly indelible impression on the dog's brain that the owner is thoroughly pleased with the dog's newly learned (newly taught) social etiquette.

Visitors in the Home

To troubleshoot this problem, invite a number of friends over to watch some videos of Westminster. When Patrick arrives, the owner may direct his/her total attention toward the dog, because there is no hurry to open the door. It doesn't matter how long it takes to get the dog to sit -- or lie down -- the owner should take encouragement that the first time will be the hardest, and from then on it will be as easy as teaching a Golden to retrieve.

Once Rover is sitting (or lying) on its mat, the owner instructs Patrick to enter. (The door is closed but unlocked and so the owner does not have to divert attention from the dog.) The owner should continually praise the dog all the time that it remains sitting on the

mat. Patrick may offer a hand for the dog to sniff and a food treat for the dog to eat, and then go and sit down in the living room. The owner then instructs Rover to say hello. Pat pets the pooch and allows it to perform the requisite nose-scan of all the olfactory goodies that reside on [the] visitors' apparel.

Once Rover has settled down and gotten used to Pat's presence, he should make a surreptitious exit and ring the doorbell again. Characteristically, Rover will make a wild and woolly rush to the door with all the uncontrolled exuberance of before, only to calm down when it realizes, "It's Patrick again!" Since the dog is calmer, it is more easily and quickly controlled. Pat enters, gives Rover a treat and then sits down to allow the dog a cursory olfactory investigation. This time Rover will not be quite as intent on nose-vacuuming Pat's pants and soles but will settle down more quickly. Exit Pat stage right, only to ring the doorbell once more. A rapid rush by Rover, but then... those familiar footsteps, a quick sniff at the bottom of the door, a glimpse of Pat's ugly mug, and the sober realization, "Patrick! Are you coming or going?"

Now Patrick's presence is no more distracting than shed Pyrrenean fur. Consequently, it is easy for the owner to get Rover to sit-stay on the mat. Rover gets it right, so Rover gets rewarded. Hence, Rover will be more likely to get it right in the future. Pat should leave and return a few more times for good luck and then settle down to warm up the DVD player.

Now it's time for the owner to call Susan. The entire multiple entry program should be repeated with each guest until the whole crew is assembled to watch Westminster. Within just a single session of concentrated training, Rover learns how to greet visitors at the front door, and the owner learns how to control his or her dog.

This article first appeared in Pure- Bred Dogs/American Kennel GAZETTE and is provided here with the permission of the author and the publisher.

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