



DOG TRAINING SOLUTIONS

How to deal with a jumping dog

Jumping is a really common problem among dogs - or should I say among dog owners? It's rarely a problem for the dogs themselves – in fact, jumping seems to act as a reward in itself. It's a different kettle of fish for the exasperated owner, who's forced to deal with a new set of muddy footprints/gouges in their skin and clothes/offended guests/scared children!

Many owners inadvertently encourage jumping behaviour from puppy hood: when a small puppy comes gambolling up to us, wiggling with excitement and making small, clumsy leaps at our knees, it's almost natural to lean down and respond in kind.

Effectively, we reward that puppy's "jump-y" greeting by reacting with exuberant affection, hugs and kisses. The puppy learns a fast lesson: jumping is a good thing, because it results in plenty of positive attention and physical contact.

Your dog doesn't understand the difference between a jump as a small, cute puppy, and a jump as a huge, hairy adult. To a dog, a greeting is a greeting, and just because he's aged by a few months is no reason to stop jumping – at least, not voluntarily.

You'll need to take matters into your own hands, and make it perfectly clear to your dog that jumping is no longer an option.

WHEN IS JUMPING NOT APPROPRIATE?

Obviously, whether or not you're prepared to accept your dog's insistence on redefining verticality all comes down to personal preference.

Many owners of smaller dogs actually *expect* them to jump up – among toy dog owners, jumping seems to be viewed as a sign of excitement and affection on the dog's behalf. The good news is that these dogs aren't likely to knock anyone flying when they're feeling rambunctious, and they're small enough that their size usually won't intimidate any but the youngest of children.

On the other hand, there's rarely a scenario where strangers will actively welcome being leapt up on by an unknown dog, regardless of said dog's size; really, it's just plain good form to teach your dog the "off" command, so that you're prepared for those incidences when you're not directly on hand to stop the jumping behaviour.

For owners of large-breed dogs, the "off" (or "no jump") command is *mandatory*. Big dogs are often taller than humans when they rear up on their hind legs (and just imagine the experience from a child's point of view, with a dog's slavering jaws looming above your own head!) – they're often heavy enough to knock smaller adults tip over tail. At the very least, a large dog's paws are heavy enough to gouge long rents in cloth and exposed flesh. Bruising and scratches are unpleasant enough to deal with when they're your own problem; but they're much worse when your dog's inflicted them on somebody else!

Really, any kind of jumping that involves anyone apart from yourself is just bad form. All owners with even pretensions of responsibility should arm their dogs with a reliable recall to the "off" command – just in case.

WHY DOES JUMPING HAPPEN?

The main reason that most dogs jump up is simply out of excitement: it's an enthusiastic greeting, reserved for times when adrenaline's running high and the dog's happy about something.

Many dogs don't jump at all, apart from when their owner returns home after a relatively prolonged absence (like the average workday). If your dog is leaping up on you in these circumstances, there's no sinister motivation at work here: he's literally jumping for joy.

A less common, but more serious, reason that some dogs will jump is to exert their dominance over you (or over whomever they're jumping on). Dogs are pack animals: they live in designated hierarchies of social rank and order. When a dog needs to assert his dominance over a lesser animal, one way of doing so is to declare physical superiority, which is usually done by "jumping up": he'll sling one or both paws over the other dog's shoulders.

You'll be able to tell the basic reason for your dog's jumping simply by considering the circumstances surrounding the event. If he only jumps up in periods of great excitement (like during play-time, or when you return home from work) then he's clearly just demonstrating an exuberant frame of mind.

If the behaviour occurs in a variety of situations, then it's more likely that he's expressing dominance over you, which is a more complex issue – the jumping's just a symptom of an underlying attitude and communication issue. Essentially, you'll need to make some serious adjustments to your overall relationship with your dog, and brush up on your alpha-dog techniques (tip: SitStayFetch has some fantastic resources on coping with a dominant dog – there's a link to the site at the bottom of the page).

FOUR PAWS ON THE GROUND, PLEASE!

How you react to your dog's jumping plays a big role in whether or not that behaviour gets repeated. You're going to need to make a prolonged effort to *be consistent* in how you choose to deal with this problem: for your dog to stop jumping, he needs to be taught that it is *never ever* acceptable for him to do so.

This means that you can't allow him to jump sometimes, but forbid him from doing it at other times. Your dog can't understand the difference between a playful and an irritable mood, or your work and play clothes: all he understands is that, if you allow him to jump up on some occasions, he'll *try* to jump up on you whenever he feels like it, because he doesn't know any better.

STOPPING THE JUMPING

Most trainers agree that the most effective way for you to weed out unwanted behaviours (like jumping) in your dog is also the easiest: all you have to do is simply *ignore him* whenever he jumps up. The idea is to give him the cold shoulder: withdraw all attention, even negative attention (so no yelling, shoving, or corrections).

Here's how to implement this training technique: whenever your dog jumps up on you, turn your back straight away. Since dogs understand body language a lot more clearly than they do the spoken word, you're going to be using your posture to convey the message that such behaviour isn't acceptable here: fold your arms, turn your back, turn your face away from him and avert your eyes. ‘

This is where a lot of people make a mistake: they confuse ignoring the *behaviour* with ignoring the *dog*. You're not ignoring the behaviour - i.e., you're not carrying on with whatever you were doing as if the jumping wasn't happening; you're ignoring your dog. You're still going to react; but your reaction is for you to actively ignore him.

The cold shoulder is a really effective way of communicating your displeasure to a dog – he'll catch on very quickly. Without the encouragement of your attention and your reactions to his behaviour, he'll calm down very quickly indeed.

WHEN TO PRAISE

When all four paws are on the ground, then – and *only* then – you can praise the heck out of him!

Don't be confused by the proximity of the positive reinforcement to the negative – dogs have a very short “training memory”, and are only capable of associating a reaction from you with whatever behaviour it is they're exhibiting at the time of that reaction.

So, it's perfectly OK for you to react with wild enthusiasm the very second that his paws touch the ground, even if you were cold-shouldering him the split-second before.

RECOMMENDED READING

For more information on understanding and solving canine behavioural problems, you'd probably be interested in checking out SitStayFetch. It's a complete how-to manual for dog owners, and is packed with just about all the information you'll ever need on dog psychology, canine communication how-to's, practical advice for dealing with problem behaviours, and detailed step-by-step guides to obedience training.

To visit SitStayFetch, just click on the link below:

<http://www.kingdomofpets.com/dogobediencetraining/index.php?aff=cbdtsol608&type=jumping>