



DOG TRAINING SOLUTIONS

Jumping on the furniture

Deciding whether or not your dog is permitted access to the furniture is a pretty big deal. If you have a big dog, it's an even bigger deal.

Furniture access is a matter of some importance for two reasons: firstly, because it's mighty inconvenient to have to fight for space on your own couch; and secondly, because it strongly relates to the matter of dominance, which is of the utmost importance as far as a harmonious dog/owner relationship goes.

Your dog knows that the furniture – in particular, your bed - is your turf. If he's allowed up onto your personal, private territory as a matter of course and whenever he feels like it, that's conceding a pretty big point to him; especially since it's rarely a two-way issue (when was the last time you invaded your dog's own turf and snuggled down for a nap in his bed?).

It's best to be aware of these things before making a final decision on furniture access for your dog. If you do decide to allow him unimpeded access, you'll need to make sure that you're extra-stringent with the other facets of alpha-dominance to prevent him from getting an over-inflated sense of self-importance.

Generally speaking, it's a good idea to forbid your dog access to the furniture outright, until he's at least five or six months old.

When a puppy's growing up, he's forming the basis of his conceptions as to what constitutes appropriate behaviour, and he's figuring out his own ranking in the social hierarchy of the household. If he's allowed to leap onto beds, couches, and armchairs (the three most-prized pieces of furniture in the house for any dog) at will and from day one, he'll have a skewed view of his own ranking.

He won't see it as the privilege that it is: he'll see it as his God-given right, and something to be taken for granted. This does a lot towards equalizing your dog's rank with your own, which – as far as your role as the owner goes – is decidedly not a good thing. To maintain a good relationship with your dog, not only do you need to be the boss, but also he needs to know that you are.

To prevent attitude problems from developing in adolescence, it's generally best to keep your puppy as humble as possible – which means that he needs to appreciate being allowed up 'on your level'.

Rule number one, as far as this issue goes, is consistency. You must be consistent! Once you've made your decision as to whether or not he's to be allowed up on the furniture, you will have to stick with that decision, or else – whatever that decision was - you won't have a hope of enforcing it.

So, if he's to be allowed up on the couch but not the bed, for example, he must never be allowed up on that bed – not even for a moment. If you decide not to allow him up on any furniture at all, you must ensure that nobody counteracts your decision and invites him up there.

Changing the rules according to human whims and impulses isn't fair on your dog. It'll just confuse him. He can't tell the difference between an expensive new couch and a grubby old one, or between clean paws and muddy paws. This can have a detrimental effect upon your own peace of mind (not to mention your dry-cleaning bill), and if you take that frustration out on your dog, it's confusing and upsetting for him.

This is why, if you're going to allow him any access at all, it's a fantastic idea to impose limits: to teach him that he can't just leap up as and when he chooses, but that he must wait for an invitation.

Inviting your dog to join you on the couch is pretty easy. All you have to do is pat the seat next to you, and – in a cheery, friendly tone – say, “Up you get!”. Most dogs need little more encouragement than this, and will be up like a shot before the second syllables even passed your lips.

You'll also need to enforce the “off” command – this allows you to relax in the knowledge that, when you want some leg room, it's there for the taking; and also reminds your dog, in no uncertain terms, that his furniture access is not a right – it's a privilege!

As is to be expected, most dogs are less enthusiastic about obeying the “off” than they are the “up you get” command: on occasion, you may be required to resort to physical force to maintain obedience. Don't worry, it's not inhumane in the slightest, merely highly effective.

HERE IS WHAT YOU DO:

- First of all, supply him with an attractive alternative. Being asked to get off a comfortable couch to lie on the unadorned floor is hardly something he's going to respond to with enthusiastic obedience: set him up for success, not failure, by giving him a comfy dog bed. You can make one yourself, out of towels and pillows, or you can purchase ready-made dog beds in a variety of sizes and materials from the pet store.
- When it's time for him to disembark, point to the dog bed and say, “Off” in a calm, authoritative voice. No need to raise your voice or shout: use a no-nonsense, but pleasant, tone.
- If there's no immediate response, do not repeat yourself. Keep your arm pointing at the bed, and maintain eye contact. If you have a perceptive dog, often it's enough to simply intensify your expression (raising your eyebrows or tightening your mouth).
- Wait for 30 seconds (which will feel like an eternity!).
- If there's no response after 30 seconds, you can resort to a physical enforcement of your request.

THE HUMANE PHYSICAL ENFORCEMENT

Some owners drag their dogs off by the collar, which is effective in the short-term (provided your dog is of a size that you can physically handle). However, it's not recommended - simply because, as a technique, it allows your dog to demonstrate his refusal to obey you.

He can still dig in his paws and strain against your opposing force, which is both downright disrespectful and counteractive to all the alpha-dominant behavioural training in the world.

It's much more effective to think smart: make him get off under his own steam, simply by making the couch (or chair, or bed) uncomfortable for him.

To do this, slide your hand, palm-down, under his rear. Slowly slide your arm forwards, using it as a lever to gently and slowly pry him off the couch. It raises his bottom in the air by degrees, which is increasingly uncomfortable for him – enough to make him leap off the couch of his own volition.

This is both more effective, and physically a lot less demanding, than dragging a reluctant dog off by his collar: by making him want to get off when you ask him to, you're strongly enforcing your obedience requirements, which is great for your role as an authority figure.

FURTHER READING

For more information on canine psychology and behavioural problems, check out SitStayFetch. It's an absolute goldmine of valuable information and advice for the responsible dog-owner, and covers just about every topic you could ever need to raise a happy, healthy, well-adjusted dog – everything from obedience work to correcting problematic behaviours to dog-whispering to teaching 'tricks' is covered in full detail.

You can check out SitStayFetch by clicking on the link below:

<http://www.kingdomofpets.com/dogobediencetraining/?aff=cdbtsol608&type=jumping>