

Jumping up: How to teach your dog a polite greeting

Why is Teaching Polite Greeting Important?

Everyone thought it was so cute when the puppy jumped up! Now that the puppy is a grown dog, people get angry when he jumps up. What happened? Unfortunately, jumping to greet is one of those places where natural dog etiquette and human etiquette clash! In the dog world, jumping up to greet is a polite sign of enthusiasm, welcome, and even appeasement. Of course, to humans, having a 60 lb. dog jumping on them when they come in the door turns out to be less than pleasing. Added to that is the fact that many dogs were reinforced for jumping up throughout their puppy hood, because they were small and fuzzy and everything they did was cute. Now they're big enough to really pack a wallop when they jump, and suddenly no one likes it anymore! The sad result is that many dogs end up getting punished for showing their natural affection when they greet people. No fair! Open Paw does not recommend the use punishment to resolve the problem behavior of jumping up on people. Punishment is counterproductive, unnecessary, and cruel: the dog is only trying to show that he likes you and is glad happy to see you. Furthermore, because jumping is one of the dog's ways to try to appease your anger, sometimes punishing the dog ends up making him jump more!

How Does Polite Greeting Work?

Open Paw's basic philosophy is to always ask yourself, "If this is wrong, or bad behavior, what would be right? What would I like to see in place of the unwanted behavior?" In this case, the unwanted behavior is jumping up. The most effective, simplest solution is to teach the dog the right way to greet people.

In this exercise you'll learn a much more productive way to teach the dog to sit or stand quietly to greet people. We use reward training to teach dogs that sitting or standing quietly gets attention and a kibble reward, while jumping up means no attention and no kibble (in fact, it makes the potential kibble and attention go away)! This works in several ways. First, it works with the dog's natural instincts ("How do I get what I want? Jumping isn't doing it, let me try something else – I'll sit down while I think about it. Hey, sitting works!") instead of against them ("My person is angry! I'd better try to make it up to her by showing how much I love and respect her! Now she's even angrier! Better jump harder!"). Second, you're not only letting them know what doesn't work (jumping), but you're also letting them know, at the same time, what does work (sitting or standing quietly). You give them an easy alternate behavior to put in place of the jumping. Dogs are very efficient in their behavior: if something works to get them what they want, they'll do it more and more. If something doesn't work, they'll do it less and less. Thus, the more times you repeat this exercise, the more quickly the dog will snuff out his jumping routine.

How do I teach my dog to greet people politely?

DO work regularly on the "sit" command with your puppy or dog, and always reward her with play, affection, a toy or food.

DO tether your dog on a 6-8' lead to a banister or other sturdy place and approach your dog; as you come up to your dog, say "Off."

DO walk away from your dog and ignore him for at least 30 seconds if she jumps up, barks, or paws.

DO reward your dog with a piece of kibble and attention if she stays standing or sits.

DO ignore or walk away from your dog if she jumps up on you at any point in your training, and reward a sit with attention, kibble, or the continuation of the training session or game.

DO gradually make yourself more interesting and exciting when your dog has gotten very good at standing still as you approach. Talk excitedly to her at first, and when she is good at standing still at that approach, jump around a bit or hold a kibble or toy in your hand.

But I like my dog to jump up some of the time.

You may, of course, do what you like with your dog. Keep in mind, though, that your dog will be meeting other people, and that most people do not like to be jumped on by any animals. There may also be times when it won't be convenient for your to be jumped on – when you're coming through the door with several bags of groceries, for instance or when Fido has muddy paws. It is also fairly easy, once you've taught your dog to sit or stand quietly to greet people, to teach him a cue that means that he may give a hug. Then the person greeting your dog can decide whether or not she wants to be jumped on.

Aren't you making the dog “unnatural” if you teach him not to jump up?

Dogs are very context-specific in their learning. If we teach them to sit or stand quietly to greet people it does not mean that they will no longer jump in other situations. They'll still jump around quite joyfully and naturally when they play – they just won't knock over your grandmother when she comes to visit.

Isn't it faster to knee the dog in the chest to stop him from jumping up?

Probably not. Punishment in this situation tends to work against your goal. Since jumping is a way, in the dog's world, to try to “make up” with you when you're angry, punishing the dog often makes her jump up even more. Further, Open Paw is dedicated to using the least amount of aversive techniques possible in training. Punishment is almost always unnecessary, and often counterproductive. Plus it is important to remember, your dog is not being intentionally “naughty” when he greets you with exuberance, he is trying to be friendly. Kneeing your dog in the chest is quite a rude way to respond to a friendly (albeit misguided) greeting.