



Peninsula Humane Society & SPCA

Help for Your Hyper Dog

When you get home does your dog jump up on you in a happy greeting?

When your dog wants to play or is excited does she grab your hand, your pants or your sleeve?

These behaviors are typical of young, energetic and playful dogs and common in some breeds. These dogs are not aggressive but excitable, high energy and impulsive. They get excited about anything they enjoy doing and may use their mouths to grab at hands or clothing or jump up on people. They have no intention in doing harm or trying to dominate. Their body language is wiggly with an open mouth and bright, happy eyes.

If your dog is aggressive towards people or other dogs and displays behaviors such as barking, growling, snapping or attempts to bite people or other dogs, please contact a behavior professional.

Excitable dogs who exhibit behaviors that people do not like may be bored, stressed or not getting enough attention. This can happen in a shelter or with dogs who need more exercise and activity including mental enrichment, a consistent daily routine and training to help learn appropriate behaviors.

You can help your excitable dog develop focus and good manners using methods based in behavioral science by teaching your dog that calm, polite behavior will get her the attention she wants.

Start by always interacting with your dog in a calm and quiet manner. Keep your voice calm and quiet. When interacting with your dog keep your movements easy and calm and avoid rough housing with the dog using your hands. Rough housing or playing with your dog with your hands will only teach the dog that hands are toys.

The first step in teaching your dog the behaviors you want is to ignore and not reward undesirable behaviors. For some dogs, even negative attention (verbal reprimand) is better than no attention at all.

If your dog jumps up on you or tries to grab your clothing ignore your dog completely. Make like a tree—turn away, cross your arms at your chest and do not look at your dog or make eye contact. When your dog is calm and has all four paws on the floor, reward and praise her. Ideally have a small food treat handy, say ‘good’ and give your dog a food treat the instant all four paws are on the ground. It’s important that everyone who routinely interacts with the dog ignores the unwanted, impulsive behaviors

If your dog doesn’t calm down while you are ignoring her, leave the room abruptly and quickly saying “uh, uh.” Dogs communicate using body language; leaving abruptly will tell your dog that you don’t want to interact with her. After a few repetitions your dog will understand that jumping up or grabbing at your clothing will not get him the attention he wants.

The second step is to think about is your dog’s daily routine. For high energy dogs, it’s important to have a daily structure that includes exercise several times a day and also activities that will engage his brain. For example, feed his meals using food dispensing toys such as a Kong. Use short training breaks of 5-10 minutes using reinforcement [reward] based methods to engage your dog’s brain. Take advantage of training sessions to teach your dog the cues that will help with learning to control impulsive behavior.

The third step is to use the “Nothing in Life is Free” program to help teach him to control his impulses and to learn he gets something he wants when he responds to a cue from you. “Nothing in Life is Free” is an easy program to implement but must be followed consistently. See PHS/SPCA’s handout “Nothing in Life is Free’.

When playing with your dog incorporate “Nothing in Life is Free’. If your dog likes to play fetch, ask your dog to obey a cue such as ‘sit’ and then toss the ball. When the dog retrieves and brings the ball back to you, make sure to ask for a ‘sit’, ‘touch’ or similar every time before you toss the ball. Do not wave the ball or toy around in your hand or allow your dog to jump up and try to grab it from your hand.



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As part the training program for a high energy dog, it's important to teach her basic commands, such as 'sit', 'down', 'shake', 'stay', 'wait', 'touch' and 'shake', that can be used every day. For basic training, enroll in PHS/SPCA's Companion Dog Level 1.

If your dog is mouthy (e.g. grabs at your hands or clothing), teach her alternatives. With consistency, these dogs can be trained to get a favorite ball or toy. If your dog tries to grab your hand or clothing, redirect her to a favorite ball or toy by using a cue such as 'Get your ball'. By doing this consistently, your dog will learn to get a ball or toy. When the dog does so, reward her with a short play break.

Take a break when you are playing fetch with your dog. Before the dog gets too excited, stop and give your dog a cue (ex, 'No more'). Sit quietly for a few moments until your dog is quiet and ignore any attempts to play. When your dog is quiet and relaxed, start playing again.

Practice "Quiet Time" with your dog so she learns to enjoy being calm and quiet. The dog can be near to a family member who is engaged in a calm, quiet activity. Ideally the dog should have her own place, such as a bed or matt and can enjoy a favorite food dispensing toy during the quiet time. It is helpful to exercise your dog before "Quiet Time".

To teach your dog to go to his bed or matt, start by bringing him to the bed and when all four paws are on the bed, praise and give him a treat. After he eats his treat, release him. When your dog starts going to the bed without you bringing him there, add a cue (ex, 'bed'). Then teach your dog to 'down' on the bed for the treat. You can also teach the dog a hand signal for going to the bed. Slowly, over a week or two, have your dog to lie quietly on the bed for a longer period of time before releasing her.

For more info, call our free Behavior Helpline (650/340-7022 x783 or, for Spanish, x786) or consider a low-cost consultation. To make a consultation appointment, call 650/340-7022 x667. The PHS/SPCA Behavior Department, like many shelter programs, is funded by donations.