

Turning your dog into a polite “door greeter”

Many dogs believe it's acceptable to greet visitors at the door by jumping on them full force. If the dog is under 15lbs, then we tend to think it's cute and lavish the dog with love. However, if the dog is over 50lbs suddenly it's not so cute, especially when it results in bruising or injury to our visitor even if the dog's only intent was to say “hi” (obviously I'm not referring to dogs who are aggressive towards unfamiliar people who enter). Our gut reaction is to yell at our poor dog for his brutish, yet overly friendly behavior. So what can we do to prevent this situation from happening again?

My advice is to teach a reliable “sit” behavior when visitors arrive, preferably several feet away from the door. This behavior should be taught and perfected in advance of anyone knocking on the door or ringing the bell. Once learned, it should then be practiced daily with family members and friends knocking at the door or ringing the bell, then to the final phase with less familiar visitors. Dogs of *all* sizes should learn a proper greeting because not everyone appreciates being jumped on by dogs, even if they are small and cute. There should be no exceptions to the “sit” behavior. In other words, it's not okay for your dog to greet dad by jumping on him, yet be restricted from jumping on grandpa.

Teaching “sit”

Show your dog a tasty treat and say “sit.” Lift the treat up and back over his nose (about 4 inches above and midway between his ears). Dogs tend to track the treat with their eyes. This causes their head to go up and back, and their butt to hit the floor. As soon as your dog's butt hits the floor say “yes,” and give the treat. If he backs up or jumps up, try placing your hand closer to his nose. You can also practice in front of a wall so your dog can't back away from you. Repeat 25-50 times, or until he learns to sit.

Next, fake your dog out by pretending that you have the treat in your hand. Show him the treat, and then place the treat in your other hand without showing him. Say “sit,” hold your hand and move it in exactly the same manner as you did before. Say “yes” and give your dog the treat. Repeat 20-30 times, or until he sits.

Gradually decrease the amount of hand movement. Say “sit,” hold your hand, palm-side up, 8 inches from his face and wait. Most likely he will sit. If he doesn't, help him out a bit by moving your hand up and back, then try again. The goal is to be able to just say “sit” without having to use your hand at all. You should also get him used to the treats being elsewhere, such as on a table or in your pocket. This teaches your dog to not become so reliant on the treat that he won't sit unless he sees it.

With consistency, practice, and patience you're on your way to having a well-behaved, polite door greeter!

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