

JUMPING UP AT VISITORS

This is a problem that most people find very difficult to deal with. How you are going to solve the problem will very much depend upon the individual characteristics of your dog. But before I go on to suggest how to teach your dog not to greet people by leaping all over them, I will explain why it is important to be aware of some of the alternative training methods which you might come across in books, or via friends who have been to different training classes.

The main reason why dogs do jump up at you stems mostly from the behaviour of their wild dog ancestry. When wild dogs return to the den from a hunting trip, all the puppies rush forward and greet the adults by jumping up and licking around their mouths. This stimulates the adults into regurgitating a partially digested meal for the pups to feed on ... this can be described as a canine version of baby food! Owners of certain breeds such as the Spitz, or Huskies, will tell you that these dogs are still inclined to behave in this manner. Therefore, in reality, there is still some ancient part lurking in your dog, which is hoping for a ready meal when you return from Tesco's.

Another reason why dogs leap up and down is because they are stressed, and find the idea of visitors coming to the house quite overwhelming. Once again, looking at the behaviour of the wild dog, you will find that in these conditions they did not have visitors over to watch television, to baby sit, or to share a meal. It was very much a case of "now we are home, this is our den, and woebetide anyone who dares to peer in on us!" Wild dogs defend their homes from outsiders. Strangers have to be removed. However, now dogs are living with us, we have been selectively breeding them for their friendliness and adaptability towards strangers, but whether this evolutionary period, or at least the remodelling stage of the species has been complete is a matter for debate. Many dogs, particularly the herding breeds, are finding themselves in a strange situation where their instinct is telling them to drive strangers away, whilst we are asking them to be nice to most strangers. So, given this situation, the dog ends up in a real quandary and displays its feelings by leaping up and down, spinning round and round, not knowing quite what it ought to be doing and this is where you come in to teach the dog precisely what is required.

Over the past 100 years, there has been some incredibly stupid advice given out by people involved in various areas of dog training. Such advice may create more problems than they solve. I am still horrified by the number of books available which advocate the following:

"When the dog jumps up, bring your knee up into its chest whilst shouting no! down!" Following this advice can result in severe (and even fatal) injuries to some of the larger breeds, especially if in doing so, you were to knock the dog off balance and it happened to fall awkwardly.

Other popular suggestions such as: stamping on the dogs back feet; grabbing the front paws and holding on until it screams; whacking it over the head with a rolled up newspaper; squirting it in the face with a water pistol, can result in the dog displaying nervous aggression towards you when you arrive home, or even towards visitors who come to your house. I am sure that most of you reading this wouldn't be foolish enough to follow this type of advice, but it is surprising what some people try when they are at the end of their tether and think they have tried everything else.

So, what can be done to stop dogs jumping up, without causing too much stress or long-term harm?

As I have already said, this will depend on the character of your own dog. If you live with a wriggler, who turns himself into a whirling dervish as soon as someone arrives at the door, then it will probably be best to attach a lead to his collar, and stand on the lead, restraining the dog until he calms down. During this time, it would be helpful if the visitor completely ignores the dog. Once the excitement has died down, the dog can be released and then you will find that he is able to greet the visitor in a much calmer fashion. Should the dog start going o.t.t. again, reattach the lead and continue to restrain him until things have calmed down again, and then repeat the foregoing advice. This is actually how I taught my dogs not to jump all over strangers. As I write this, I have a man working on my television that blew up, and when he arrived, I only had to hold on to Lotte and Nalle's collars until they calmed down, and then they left the man to get on with his work. In the early stages of training though, I kept their leads by the front door, so that I could attach their leads and restrain them quite quickly. Now I only have to touch their collars and this is enough for them to understand "don't jump on this person".

For dogs that are more laid back in character, teach them to sit before anyone is allowed to greet them. Eventually the dog will learn that sitting is what gets rewarded, so this will become the dogs preferred option. One lady whom I visited, had a noticed pinned to her door which read "I am currently training my dog not to jump all over you, so can you please help by waiting until she is sitting before you greet her, thank you".

Some dogs are born attention seekers, and nothing appears to calm them, so attempting to teach them anything often appears to be out of the question because they are so stressed by the situation. With this type of dog, I suggest getting an empty drinks can, and placing a few pebbles inside so that it makes a loud rattling noise when shaken. As a matter of safety, ensure that you place some sellotape across the hole, so that when you shake or drop the can, the pebbles don't all fly out. Keep this can fairly close to the entrance of your house, so that you can easily get to it when the dog starts going berserk as visitors arrive. As soon as it does, throw the can to the floor, either in front of, or behind the dog, so that he startles. Once this interrupts the flow of behaviour, show the dog what you would rather him do instead, i.e. to sit, or go somewhere else and lie down. If he starts to leap around again, repeat the process until he gets the message. **Warning: this type of 'sound aversion' therapy should not be used on dogs that are very sound sensitive.**

Other types of aversion therapy include Dog Training Discs, which consist of five little symbols that are attached to something resembling a key fob. To use the discs successfully, the dog needs to be taught how to respond to them correctly; therefore you will need to see a demonstration, or to purchase the video, which may be purchased as part of the package. Again, discs are not suitable for all dogs. Finally, regarding aversion therapy. There is a device called a Master Plus, which via a remote control, squirts a fine spray of citronella or an odourless oil up towards the dogs face. This gadget is extremely expensive to purchase, therefore should only be used as a final deterrent for very persistent jumpers up. If you would like to try using a Master Plus, I have a couple which are available for rent.

Dogs who jump over you when you come home

Obviously, when you return home from work or an outing, it would be rather difficult for you to try attaching your dogs lead so that you could stand on it, or searching around to try and find a rattle can. Therefore what I did with Lotte and Nalle was to totally ignore them as I came through the door. Initially, I had Lotte pinned to my waist (and yes, her claws did hurt) but I still ignored her and just carried on through the house, unpacked the shopping or whatever, and didn't even acknowledge her existence until she calmed right down. It took a fair amount of persistence on my part, and a good few weeks for Lotte to get the message, but eventually she did, and now when I return home, she runs around all excited, but does not jump on me at all.

Finally, and I know this from personal experience, that when you are trying to teach your puppy or adult dog not to jump up, there are people who have completely different ideas and actively encourage dogs to jump all over them. They often say things like "it's O.K. I love dogs so I don't mind them jumping up". Obviously this can blow all your hard work in seconds. Therefore I suggest the following comments may come in useful:

1. "Yes, perhaps you won't mind today, but what happens if we meet you next week, and it's raining, so the dog has muddy paws".
2. "I have a toddler at home, and the dogs jumping is causing injuries".

Otherwise just tell people that you are in the process of training your dog to be socially acceptable. They might not like hearing this and complain if your dog is merely a puppy, but puppies only remain puppies for a few months, and then jumping up is not perceived as being quite so cute!

If you have further problems, which the above advice is not solving, then please speak to me, as it may be that a private house training session is required.