



**A non-profit that educates
and supports dog owners**

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THE OVERLY EXCITED DOG

You come home after a busy day at work and as you walk through the door, your dogs bark and jump on you, knocking your purse out of your hand. Your young children are running and playing in the back yard and your dog chases and nips at them tearing their pants. Your neighbor comes to visit and your dogs bark, paw and jump on him at your front door. Out of control, overly excited behavior can occur for a variety of reasons and in response to many situations. You can improve your dog's behavior with the right techniques.

Why Do Dogs Become Overly Excited?

Dogs often become overly excited or out of control when they are greeting people or other dogs. This can be in response to unfamiliar or familiar people or dogs, or both. As a normal part of greeting between dogs, they may sniff and lick one another's faces. Because people are usually taller than dogs, dogs jump or paw at people to get to their faces. In the process they can knock into people or scratch them with their paws.

Dogs also can get out of control when playing with people or other dogs. They may chase their playmates, run into people or dogs, grab clothing or body parts, or jump on them.

Some dogs may get out of control when they become excited by what they see and/or hear, such as cars and trucks, other dogs, cats or other animals, bicyclists or skateboarders, which they may or may not be able to get to. In their excitement, they may knock into or jump up on people or dogs standing nearby.

What Can Be Done to Manage or Change Overly Excited Behavior?

The easiest way to manage the overly excited dog is to keep him away from the situations that trigger the excitement. Not allowing your dog to go to the front door to greet visitors, or keeping him inside when the kids play in the back yard can prevent injuries to others. While effective, this management technique may not always be possible.

The best way to change overly excited behavior is to teach your dog to perform a behavior that is incompatible with the excited behavior and is more appropriate to the situation. For example, your dog can be taught to go to a specific spot and to sit quietly when he hears the doorbell ring or people come to the front door. When your children begin to run and play, your dog can be taught to come and find you or another adult and sit next to you. Read the Pamphlet for Pet Parents about counter conditioning and desensitization, punishment and positive reinforcement for more information.

It takes time and effort to train dogs to sit quietly when there's lots of activity going on. Start with simple situations where you can make it easy for your dog to learn, then gradually make it more challenging for him. Use

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Yelling at, hitting or grabbing your dog will only increase his excitement.

tasty food treats to reward good behavior. Divide whatever behavior you want your dog to do into more easily achievable parts and try to work with your dog everyday for short time periods.

For example, to teach your dog to come to you when your children are rambunctious, put your dog on leash and call him to you while your children are playing in a low-key way. Have your dog sit and stay with you for a minute or so, then allow him to go investigate your children. Repeat this sequence. You must teach your dog what you want under less intense conditions if you expect him to come to you when he's excited. Be consistent in what you have him do and make sure everyone else in the household is as well.

Another strategy that can be used in conjunction with teaching an incompatible behavior is to use the "take away" method for the inappropriate, out of control behavior. When your dog jumps up on people or nips at pants legs, for example, confine him someplace he doesn't want to be for two minutes. You are "taking away" his chance to play and be social, by putting him in a laundry room or mudroom.

When he's excited, your dog usually wants attention and interaction with you or others. If you take away his opportunities to achieve this social contact, he'll learn to control himself. You must catch him in the act of being uncontrollable when you use the "take away method" and you must be consistent to make this work.

You may need the help of a professional dog trainer, certified applied animal behaviorist, veterinary behaviorist or other behavior consultant to help you with this training.

What Not to Do

Don't yell at your dog, chase him, hit him or grab him when he gets out of control. This will only increase his excitement level and won't change his behavior. If your dog learns to associate someone reaching for his collar with unpleasantness he may begin to bite whenever anyone reaches toward him quickly. Physical punishment is unlikely to work and may make the problem worse. Many dogs that are difficult to control become even more excited and aroused if yelled at or restrained. Over-excitement and out of control behavior isn't due to your dog being "dominant". So called "dominance exercises" or procedures won't stop or prevent the behavior.

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