

FACT SHEET

Unruly Behaviour - Jumping on People

Many owners become frustrated with dogs when they behave in a way that seems anti-social. Dogs that constantly jump up on their owners or visitors can cause serious injury if they cause the person to become unbalanced and fall and this behaviour can frighten people who are not used to dogs, especially large dogs such as greyhounds.

Why do dogs like to jump up on people?

Jumping up to greet people is thought to originate from the puppy behaviour of jumping up to greet adult dogs. The puppies jump up to lick the corners of the adult dog's mouth which triggers a regurgitation of food which the puppies can then eat. Licking at the faces of other dogs often continues into later life as a form of submissive greeting. Because our faces are well off the ground, jumping up at a human is the dog's way of trying to get closer to our face.

This behaviour may seem very cute in a tiny puppy, but it loses its appeal when the dog is a hefty 40kg adult, or when the dog has muddypaws from being outside. Jumping up on people is also a problem if the dog catches the person off balance, as it could potentially lead to a fall.

Unfortunately we often encourage and reinforce this behaviour over time. When puppies are small and cute, or when dogs are new to a household we often let them jump up on us and reach down and give them a pat or cuddle. They simply assume this is an acceptable way to greet humans after all they get lots of attention and interaction when they do jump up. This can occur with adult dogs too, especially those that are excited. The greeting behaviour of jumping up is reinforced with pats and attention. Some people try to push the dog down with their hands, or end up yelling and making a lot of noise to try to stop this behaviour.

The problem with these two options is the dog may see it as a game – I jump up and you push me down –lots of fun! They still have your 100% attention, and you are still interacting with them so they are getting reinforced for a behaviour that you really don't want.

So how can we coach a polite greeting that does not involve the dog jumping up?

Dogs cannot be expected to understand how we would like them to greet us, so it is up to us to show them what we want. For most people, their preferred greeting is for the dog to sit in front of them. We need to make it very clear to the dog that he will get no attention unless he is sitting. Because some greyhounds find sit very difficult to master – the other alternative is 'four feet on the floor' – a 'stand'.

You need to look at this as a training exercise – you will need to set up some greetings, so that you can coach and train the correct response. It is probably not a good idea to start trying to train this when you first come home from work, as your dog will be too excited. Instead, work on greeting the dog when he is a little more settled.

Start with one person holding the dog on the leash. Have a second person approach the dog and greet it, they can say 'Hello, Spot' as if they were meeting the dog. If the dog goes to jump at them, the person that is approaching the dog quickly turns their back and walks a few steps away. The person holding the leash does nothing – no jerking or pulling - they do not need to even say anything. They are simply there to stop the dog from following the 'visitor' as they walk off.

This greeting is repeated as many times as needed. The person approaches, and if the dog jumps up, the person turns their back and walks away. Eventually the dog will offer a sit or just stand there, and this is the moment that the 'visitor' can quickly reward the dog with a treat, and a pat and cuddle.

You will need to practise this regularly (a few times each day is a great way to start), but the more that you do it the quicker the dog will offer the four on the floor response or a sit. By turning their back on the dog the dog does not get any attention, not even any eye contact, and the fact that the person walks away, also provides a consequence for the dog – you jump up, I will leave.

Once your greyhound is showing some improvement, you will then have to practise this with a variety of people, all of whom do the same thing. Ask friends and family to help you. You will also have to practise the greeting behaviour in different locations - on your walks, outside the shops, and anywhere else your dog may greet people. If everyone that the dog greets does the same thing, your dog will soon understand that there are never any pats or attention unless all four feet are on the ground.

If your dog does greet someone politely without being 'set up' to do so, you can also reward the dog yourself. Just make sure you remember to carry some treats the dog really likes. If you see someone about to greet the dog, you can then either give them a treat and ask the person to give the dog the treat when he does the right thing, or you can reward the dog yourself.

At home you can also practise at doorways as this is another place where many people have a lot of problems with the dog jumping up on them. If your dog jumps up on you as you go out into the backyard, or as you come through the gate, practise the same routine here. Open the gate or door, if the dog goes to jump up, walk away and shut the gate behind you. Then open it again, shut it, open it, shut it, until the dog offers 'four on the floor' or a sit. Then you can quickly reward the dog with a treat and go and give him all the cuddles and pats he wants.

If your dog is really over the top when you first come home, sometimes they need to settle a little before they can muster the emotional control to be able to achieve a polite greeting. In this case, do not go and greet your dog for the first 10 minutes or so after you come home. You can just ignore him and go about unpacking your things. When he seems to settle a little, then go out and work on your greeting behaviour.

For dogs who like to play, another option is to keep a few toys or ball near the gate or back door, and immediately throw one as you come through into the yard. The dog will learn to expect the toy, and will focus on chasing after it rather than 'mugging' you.

What if I want my dog to jump up and greet me?

This is fine, as long as YOU ask the dog to jump up on cue, and don't reward attempts to jump up by the dog at other times with pats and attention.