

Six Steps to a Well-Mannered Canine

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It's such a joy and pleasure to share your life with a well-mannered canine companion. Dogs with acceptable social behaviors are delightful walking buddies; they don't pull on the leash and they don't bark at passersby. Trained dogs are a joy when accompanying their owners on shopping trips and visits to friends' homes; they sit when greeting people and lie quietly while their owners sip coffee at the neighborhood latte' stand.

Dogs with manners know how to sit and wait while their owners attach their leashes prior to going out the door. These dogs wait on their rugs to have their feet wiped when it's muddy outside. They don't jump on people, don't growl over food or toys, don't steal things out of the garbage – and they come when called!

If this sounds like your well-mannered dog, congratulations! You've obviously developed a wonderful relationship with your dog, one built on mutual respect, plenty of exercise, basic obedience training and lots of love with clearly defined limits and rules.

On the other hand, if your dog's behavior needs some serious improvement, there is hope. Just follow these six simple steps:

1. **Increase your dog's exercise.** Dogs with behavior problems, such as chewing, barking and digging, are often bored – physically as well as mentally. Dogs with high energy levels need more than just a casual walk around the block; they need to go for a long run, gallop after the ball in the backyard, go swimming or learn to trot beside their owner on a bicycle or treadmill. Daily workouts are best, but be sure to consult with your veterinarian prior to beginning a serious exercise program.
2. **Earn your dog's respect.** Loving your dog will not automatically cause your dog to respect you. You may know children whose parents love them but don't set limits. As a result their behavior may be unacceptably out-of-control and disrespectful. The same is true for dogs whose owners neglect to establish rules for behavior. Dogs respect, and adore, humans who provide consistent pack leadership.
3. **Be clear and be consistent.** Inconsistent owners frustrate otherwise good dogs. It's not fair to your dog if you allow it to jump on you when you're wearing jeans, but admonish it when you're dressed for a party. Families should identify rules of behavior for their pets, and then set up a training program to clearly explain their expectations to their canine companions. And everyone in the family needs to follow through!
4. **Don't nag. Say it once and mean it.** Pack leaders are like good mother dogs; they say it once and then follow through. If you tell your dog to sit, be prepared to gently enforce the sit without nagging. In the beginning stages of training, help your dog sit by gently holding his collar and pushing his rear to the ground. Increase the time he remains sitting (with your gentle help) until you release him with a hearty "Okay!" command. Never give a command unless you're prepared to follow through!
5. **Be proactive.** Instead of *reacting* to your dog's misbehavior, take the time to decide what you want him to do instead. *Be proactive.* If you don't want him to jump on visitors when they enter your house, what would you like him to do instead? It's easy to teach a dog to sit for greeting – if you plan it out in advance. Have the leash handy and use it before opening the front door. If necessary, put a sign on the door telling guests "Dog in Training – Please be Patient" and enlist their aid as you practice the exercise.
6. **Enroll in a good obedience training program.** With the help of a qualified, professional instructor, you and your dog can build a loving relationship, based on mutual respect and understanding. Beginning level obedience classes should cover basic commands such as sit, down, come, sit for greeting and controlled walking, and usually include solutions to common behavior problems such as barking, chewing, digging, mouthing, jumping up, etc. Positive reinforcement is the ideal way to go; however, beware of programs that are entirely food and reward based. Some dogs, like some children, may need a different approach that includes limits with consequences.

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Possible Solutions to Common Behavior Problems

Chewing? Barking? Digging? Stealing? Jumping Up? Is your dog driving you crazy?

The following information is intended to help dog owners diagnose, and then resolve, common behavior problems. It is not intended to be a substitute for professional consultation with a qualified dog trainer or dog behavior expert. Contact the staff at Family Dog Training Center for assistance with your dog: www.familydogonline.com or (253) 854-9663.

Inappropriate chewing: Puppies chew when they are teething. Most dogs enjoy chewing. Some dogs chew when they are bored. Always provide breed and age appropriate bones and toys. When you catch your dog in the act of chewing on something he shouldn't, quietly take the wrong object away and replace it with one of his toys. Be sure your house is properly dog-proofed. When leaving your dog home alone, be sure he cannot access inappropriate items. If supervision and redirection do not fully resolve the problem, consider using one of the bitter sprays to make the object less appealing.

Inappropriate barking: Many owners want their dogs to bark once when the doorbell rings, or someone enters their property, or he needs to go potty. If you want your dog to alert you with a single bark, praise him and then tell him "Quiet." When dogs bark inappropriately, or won't stop barking on command, consider the following: If your dog is barking because someone or something is stimulating him, change the environment. If your dog is barking because he's bored or wants your attention, he probably needs more exercise and basic obedience training. Teach him to do a few simple tricks so you can give him attention for quiet behaviors. Never yell at your dog when he barks because he won't hear the words, he'll just hear you (pack leader) "barking" too! Distract the dog with a spray of water, clap of hands, shake of a rattle bottle and then praise him for being quiet. Citronella spray collars are worth considering when other techniques stop working.

Mouthing/nipping: Puppies use their mouths to assert their dominance. Unchecked, this behavior can continue into adolescence as the dog learns to manipulate people and situations with his mouth. Dogs will not put their mouths on people they respect. Redirect your dog to a toy when he uses his mouth in play. Use calming techniques to stop mouthing done by dogs who don't want to have their nails trimmed. Bitter sprays, or sprays of water, may help. Excessive mouthing, nipping and most certainly biting, require the assistance of a professional.

Jumping on people: Dogs jump on people to get attention. Give your dog attention for sitting. Teach him to "sit for greeting" when you come home from work and when friends come to your house. When you take your dog for a walk, ask your dog to sit before you allow people to pet him.

Running away: Prevention is the key. Fences, leashes and long lines, in conjunction with obedience training, will help your dog learn to stay with you. If your goal is total off-leash control, plan to spend a year in good quality obedience classes where your dog learns to avoid distractions.

Not coming when called: Once again, prevention is paramount. Leashes and long lines can help show your dog how to come and yummy treats along with praise and petting should reward proper behavior. Teach your dog to sit when he comes, so he doesn't just run off again. Never nag your dog because every time you say "Come" and he doesn't, you're training him to ignore you! A reliable off-leash recall requires a lot of on-leash training around distractions.

Digging: Some dogs were bred to dig (like many terriers)! Some dogs dig to escape their boring back yards. Some dogs dig because they watched their owners plant flowers and dig weeds. Prevention is the first step. If your dog is digging in the same place all the time, laying chicken wire on the ground, or sprinkling black pepper in the area might help. Increase your dog's exercise. If you have to leave him alone outside, be sure he's in a dig-proof location.

Stealing things: Dogs often steal items out of boredom or to get attention. Make sure your dog has access to appropriate toys. If you see your dog steal something, quietly walk after him and trade him the item he took with one of his toys or a treat. Give your dog more attention when he has the right object. Do not leave your dog alone unattended with tempting items in reach (such as on kitchen counters or coffee tables). Safe "booby traps" are sometimes useful: bitter spray or black pepper might deter the dog.

Not listening: If your dog isn't listening to you, you're probably talking too much! Use one or two word commands. Say the command one time. Show the dog what the words mean. Praise and/or feed the dog for doing the right thing. Use gentle hands, leashes, etc., to help the dog do the right thing on the first command. Be sure the dog continues to obey the command until you release him with a hearty "Okay" or "That's all!"