



True North Training

Ask The Trainer: Jumping Up On People

QUESTION:

My dog will not stop jumping up on people! It's bad enough at the dog park, where people are dressed for the occasional muddy paw prints on their jeans, but it doesn't matter where we are or what we are doing---if he sees a human, he wants to put his paws all over them. It's embarrassing, and once it was actually expensive because he jumped on a woman who was dressed up, and I felt obligated to offer to pay her cleaning bill. How can I get him to stop this???

ANSWER:

I feel for you! My own dog was a confirmed jumper-up, and while I haven't had to pay for a suit to be dry cleaned, I've definitely been embarrassed (after all, when you are a dog trainer and your dog jumps up on people, it doesn't look good!).

It may help you, at the beginning, to understand that dogs are sort of "hard-wired" for jumping up. As puppies, this is how they ask their moms for attention, and it's how wolf pups ask for food when they get to the age to transition from nursing to actual food. So your puppy, when young, will try to solicit attention from all and sundry, using the tools s/he has---i.e., jumping up on people.

That's where it begins. Unfortunately, people often don't have the tools to nip this behavior in the bud, and so the puppy grows up trying to solicit attention and then having all sorts of things happen as a result. These human reactions, which can range from telling the dog "Off!" while pushing the dog's paws away to physical punishment of various types, generally don't work very well. Some dogs perceive the whole thing as a kind of roughhouse game, and seem not to mind even such punishments as being kneed in the ribs. And the problem can be compounded by non-owners who assure the owner of the dog that it's OK for the dog to jump up ("Oh, don't worry! He's not hurting anything!" as they pat the dog and play with the dog while the dog is jumping up on them.) The humans get more and more frustrated, and the dog doesn't stop jumping up.

So what's a human to do??

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The best method for eliminating jumping up is to (absolutely consistently) remove the dog's reward for jumping up. ("Wait!!" I can hear you saying. "REWARDS?? I don't give the dog rewards for jumping up!") Maybe you don't. But...dogs who are not rewarded for doing something like jumping up pretty quickly quit. So...let's define the word "reward." I'll bet that most people think of rewards as being the same as treats, or praise, or opportunities to play a game.

I will also bet that most dogs would define the word "reward" more broadly. Yes, treats are good rewards. So are games, and toys, and if you (the dog) are in the mood for it, praise and petting could also be rewarding. But if you haven't seen your human for the last 8 hours because he or she has been at work? Well...(says the dog) "That thing we do where I jump up on the human, and the human talks loudly to me and pushes on me, and then I jump up some more, and they say that word "OFF" and push harder or faster---that's often pretty rewarding."

"Or, if we are out for a walk, and we see humans that I have met before but haven't seen for a long time; or we see a new human, who I would very much like to be friends with, well, I can try that jumping-up thing and see if those humans will also play with me..."

You can see where this is going. Dogs often never learn that they will have more and better and happier interactions with all those humans in their life if they DON'T jump up on them. Because it's soooooooooooooooooo rewarding when they DO jump up on them.

So. To teach your dog how to interact with people, you will need to teach these things:

- 1) A really, really solid sit-stay (teach this first when there are no people around to be jumped up on, so that your dog will ignore a lot of distractions in favor of sitting and staying when you say it's time to do that).
- 2) People will not be available to be jumped up on, ever again (this means that you will need to be very proactive about asking passers-by to cooperate with your training program. You will also need to be proactive about making sure your dog doesn't have the chance to jump on anyone---when you're walking with the dog on leash, just move away from anyone who approaches within jumping up range. You may need to temporarily avoid locations where the dog is not on-leash, such as the dog park, until the dog has understood about not jumping on people).
- 3) It is VERY rewarding to greet people with "4 on the floor". Once the dog will sit-stay, you can begin to introduce carefully-coached people to the dog. They should stop about 10 feet from you and wait while you get your dog in a sit-stay. Then they should approach slooooooowwwlllllyyyy. So long as the dog stays sitting, they continue to approach. If the dog breaks the sit, they back away while you put the dog back in the sit-stay, and then they attempt to approach again. If the dog stays seated (this is very important at the beginning of this training), they do NOT yet pet the dog. Instead, they may hold out one hand for the dog to sniff, being ready to back up immediately and quickly if the dog breaks the sit-stay. The dog's handler should reward the dog with something the dog loves---a special kind of treat, or a game of tug, or an opportunity to play with a toy the dog enjoys (which is kept for this training project).

As the dog gets better at sitting and staying while people approach and let the dog sniff their hand, the approaching person may start to pet the dog. At the beginning, this should take the form of scratching the dog under the chin, on the neck, and chest, but the petter AND the handler need to keep this low-key so that the dog doesn't get too excited and break the sit-stay. Note: Petting the dog

on top of the head should wait until the dog masters staying in the "sit" while being scratched under the chin, neck, and chest.

Once the dog is absolutely steady on-leash, pick a quiet day to visit the dog park. If someone approaches, call your dog, have him sit, and then ask the other person to approach slowly. If the dog forgets and jumps up, do not despair---just put him on the leash again and then ask the person to try one more time. Give the "sit-stay" command, and then teach the dog the greeting game again in this new setting. Over time you will find that your dog generalizes the training to his off-leash time, and you'll be able to feel confident that your days of embarrassment (and possibly expense!) are over.

It can take some time to go through this training process with a dog who is a confirmed jumper-upper. With a puppy, who doesn't have so much "history", it will go more quickly. But it's worth the time you spend!!

