

# Jumpy and Mouthy Behavior

Jumping and mouthing are normal dog behaviors that are undesirable when done to their human companions. Dogs jump up on people as a greeting or to get attention. Sometimes this jumping is accompanied by mouthing. Mouthing is when a dog grabs at people using their mouths without causing an injury and is different than biting. Mouthing typically happens when a dog is playing or over excited. Dogs explore the world with their mouths and use their mouths during interactions with other dogs, but dogs need to be taught how to appropriately interact with humans.

Jumping and Mouthing can become more problematic if left unaddressed. These behaviors can increase in frequency and intensity, leading to unintended injury.

Follow the recommendations below to teach your dog not to jump or mouth people, and how to appropriately play and get attention.

## What to do when the dog is jumping and/or mouthing:

Enforce this simple rule: If the dog jumps or puts their mouth on you or your clothes all fun stops. Even if it only happens once or only a brief second. Do not get angry with the dog, just be consistent. Follow these steps to enforce the rule:

- Turn your back and stand still or take one step away (do not run away, that leads to a game of chase)
- Pull your arms and legs in close to your body and out of reach
- Let your arms and legs go limp or still, so they are not fun to play with
- If you were playing, stop the game
- If you were petting the dog, stop petting
- If jumping and mouthing persists, take a brief 'time out' and leave the room for 30-60 seconds or until the dog has calmed down

Once the dog has stopped jumping and/or mouthing you want to praise good behavior, so the dog knows what to do instead of jumping or mouthing. ALWAYS praise good behavior in some way, treats, toys, or even verbal praise such as 'good dog!'.

When the dog stops jumping and mouthing, the best praise is to give them what they want: continue playing with a toy, pet them in long, slow, calm strokes (quick pats will excite the dog and possibly restart the jumping and mouthing).

Encourage acceptable forms of play and greeting with the dog, so they know how to interact with you.

- When greeting people, ask the dog for a 'sit' before touching the dog
- Give treats and tell them 'good dog!' for being calm when greeting someone
- Play with toys, fetch is not an 'outside tennis ball only' game

### How to Prevent jumping and/or mouthing:

The best method to stop jumping and mouthy behavior is to prevent it from happening in the first place. Avoid circumstances where the dog will choose to jump or use their mouth inappropriately. The less they get to practice doing those behaviors, the quicker they will stop choosing to do them.

- Keep the dog on a leash when meeting visitors, only allow them to approach when they have all feet on the ground
- Always use toys when playing. If a toy is in their mouth, they can't put arms or hands in their mouth
- Avoid rough housing and wrestling play
- Do not wave hands around their head and face – this encourages them perceiving the hands as acceptable playthings
- Give the dog a toy to chew on while you pet them
- Do not encourage playing when you are petting them, a toy to gently chew is fine, but you don't want the dog to get excited and play when you are only wanting to pet them
- Use long, slow, calm strokes when petting the dog
- Always have a favored toy with you so you can put the toy in their mouth if they start to get mouthy

Make sure the dog is getting enough regular exercise. Go for walks before playtime to spend energy appropriately. Lack of exercise can lead to worse jumping and mouthy behavior. With excess energy they have a hard time controlling their excited mouthy and jumpy behavior.

Practice impulse control skills. Taking training classes and training cues like 'stay' 'wait' 'drop it' and 'leave it' are great skills that will teach patience. Use modern positive reinforcement-based methods to build confidence and trust in your dog.

### What NOT to do:

There are many myths about how to correct jumping and mouthy behavior that do not work and that lead to worse behavior.

- Kneeing, squeezing the dog's feet, grabbing the dog's muzzle or scruff, yelling, or pushing the dog away make the behavior worse. Many dogs think that you are playing and find it fun.
- Slapping, hitting, flicking the nose, pinching their lip, or sticking fingers down their throat can lead to one of two different outcomes, neither the outcome you want:
  - The dog may interpret it as play and lead them to play more aggressively or bite harder.
  - The dog may become afraid of you leading to real biting and aggression.
- Jerky movements with your hands or feet look like a game to the dog
- We do not recommend using a crate as a time out spot. You may place the dog in a different room than yourself, or remove yourself from the room the dog is in. If you use the crate as a time out spot, they may start to associate negative feelings with the crate and then it becomes more difficult to get them to use their crate.