



How to Get Your Dog to Behave

Many times, the key to getting your dog to do what you want -- or stop doing what you don't want -- comes down to using the right technique. A basic knowledge of how behavior modification works can take you a long way in dealing with your dog.

There's a simple, basic principle underlying all behavior modification techniques, which is that your dog -- like any animal -- will behave in ways that increase the chance of getting it what it wants, and cease to behave in ways that decrease the chance of getting it what it wants.

Here are the techniques that work best:

1. Positive Attention -- Positive attention includes giving your dog food rewards, praising them, playing with them, or interacting with them in any friendly, positive way.

Any time your dog does anything you like and want him to continue doing, (i.e., chewing on the appropriate toy, doing something cute, when your dog complies with what you ask him to do - sit, down, wait, etc.) give positive attention. Do the same at the moment the dog stops an unwanted behavior (leaves the cat alone, stops chewing on inappropriate item, removes feet from the table top, etc.).

2. Interrupt and Redirect -- When your dog is engaged in something you don't want him to do (chewing the wrong item, feet on the table, walking toward something inappropriate) make a short, sharp sound with your voice (i.e., Ah-ah! Or Hey! with a hand clap added if needed).
 - a. This should startle your dog, and you should get that "deer in the headlights" look. At that moment, praise your dog for disengaging. After the interruption, your dog, left to their own devices, may return to the source of interest. If this happens interrupt your dog again, praise them for ceasing the unwanted behavior, and redirect them to do something else (i.e., give them the appropriate chew toy, have them walk toward you, have them sit, etc.). By engaging your dog in something new you reduce the chance that they'll return to the original behavior.
 - b. After a time your dog will learn that the sound means to stop what they're doing. Always remember to praise your dog when he does stop.

The 'startle' sound is much more effective than saying 'no.' He'll just naturally respond to the startle sound, but over time may tune you out when you say no. If you think about it, repeating no sounds a little bit like you're barking at your dog. It's as if you're all barking together, which isn't going to teach your dog what you want him to do or stop doing.

3. Ignore -- Ignore any behavior(s) you want to disappear forever (i.e., jumping on you without an invitation, demanding attention by barking at you, demanding you interact with him by pawing, leaning, bumping, placing a toy in your lap, putting his head in your lap to be petted, jumping on the furniture, jumping up toward your face, etc.).

Being consistent about this is key -- if you sometimes ignore your dog for jumping into your lap, and sometimes welcome them, the dog won't get the message. Also, be prepared for your dog to become very insistent with the undesired behavior before it goes away. If the dog isn't getting

results with an action that worked before, they will step up their efforts, and it may become increasingly difficult to ignore them -- but you still have to be consistent!

At times you may have to make it clear to the dog that you are deliberately ignoring them. You can do this by turning your head or body away from the dog, folding your arms, or actually walking away.

For dogs that are pushy and demanding of your attention (i.e., petting, playing, space invasion, etc.), it is always a good idea for you to initiate the interactions you have with your dog. You still get to enjoy petting and playing with your dog, but doing this on your terms (you decide when it starts and when it stops), is a very effective way to teach your dog to respect your personal space and ultimately listen to you much more attentively.

3. **Negative Attention** -- Most people don't realize that negative attention (i.e., yelling at your dog to get off of you, repeating his name several times to get him to stop doing something, chasing him when he grabs something he's not supposed to have so that you will interact with him, etc.) can actually be perceived as a positive thing by your dog. Being scolded is unpleasant for a person, but for a dog it's another way of engaging with a human, and they'll take what they can get!

Your inclination will be to give your dog negative attention when they're doing something you don't like, but don't do it! You could be inadvertently reinforcing the behavior you're trying to eliminate.

If you replace negative attention with interrupt/redirect OR ignore, and then add in positive attention at every opportunity, your dog will soon start to behave in a way that works best for both of you.

Key Points that Really Work!

The 2-Second Follow Up Rule: When you want your dog to comply, say your command or make your interruptive sound only one time, give your dog two seconds to comply, and if he doesn't, immediately (and always) take action (i.e., lure him into a sit or down [rather than repeating the cue several times], walk toward him to move him away from something if he ignores your interruptive sound, etc.).

By providing consistent, fair and loving leadership, you will find that you will both be happier and enjoy your relationship in ways that work for everyone!

For more information on behavior and training for dogs and cats, please visit our web site at www.sspca.org/pet-carebehavior/.