

Jumping Up

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Dogs are social animals, so greeting comes naturally to them. They also belong to a species with very ritualized social behaviors, which are quite different from ours. For example, licking another dog's lips and corners of the mouth is a typical greeting behavior. It should come as no surprise, then, that a dog will greet his owner pretty much like he greets other dogs, not because he regards us as dogs (the process of imprinting has ensured that dogs perceive humans as being different from them), but because that behavior is part of the dog's communication and, unlike humans who can learn to speak different languages, dogs use the only language they know. Another common reason why dogs jump up is simply because nobody has taught them not to! Now you may find it so cute how your 8-week old puppy jumps up to greet you because he is so excited to see you. And so does the rest of the family and friends. But how cute will this behavior be when the puppy is 8 months old and knocks over a child or an elderly or fragile person? How cute will this behavior be when you're all dressed up to go out and the puppy comes running from the garden and jumps up at you with muddy paws? This is when problems begin and the puppy gets confused – on one hand, you encourage him to jump up by opening your arms, patting your knees, clapping your hands when you come home and are as excited about greeting him as he is about greeting you. On the other hand, when you are all dressed up and ready to go out, the last thing you want is for him to jump up. As soon as he does, you push him down. What you have really done, is reward him with physical contact for having jumped (yes, we often inadvertently reward the very behaviors that we want to extinguish). Since behaviors that are rewarded tend to repeat themselves, you will actually be encouraging your puppy to jump up! So, as pushing your puppy down is not working, you knee him on the chest, in an attempt to make it quite clear that you do not want him jumping up. You will then be faced with two problems: firstly, kneeling the puppy on the chest hurts him; secondly, by the time you knee him he will already have jumped, so you are not preventing jumping from occurring – by the time you take action, it will already have occurred! The same applies to pushing him down. In short, if you want to prevent your puppy from jumping up, you need to actively teach him not

to do it, as opposed to taking action after he is done it. So how should you teach him ? 1) Think of something that your puppy cannot physically do and jump up at the same time. For example, a puppy cannot sit and jump up at the same time. Teach him to sit so that he will learn that in order to greet you or be greeted he has to remain sitting. Make sure you reward him and lavish him with praise while teaching him to sit. Be careful, though, not to use a too enthusiastic tone of voice when you praise, so that you do not run the risk of him popping right back up again. Reward and praise are paramount (remember that behaviors that are rewarded tend to repeat themselves, and remember that dogs do what works for them. So, if jumping up is more rewarding than sitting, he will opt for jumping, hence the importance of rewarding the sit). 2) Remember that repetition is important during the learning process. So be consistent and patient. Do not make the mistake of giving your puppy attention should he jump. Make sure the rest of the family and friends behave likewise. Should the puppy jump, cross your arms, turn your back on him and simply ignore him. If you and everyone else consistently reward and praise the puppy for sitting and ignore him for jumping up, he will eventually learn that sitting is more rewarding than jumping up. In other words, sitting means getting attention whereas jumping up results in being ignored. Expect your puppy to make mistakes while you're teaching him. After all, dogs also learn through trial and error!