

Teach Your Dog to Say Please

Modified from "How to Behave so your dog behaves" by Sophia Lin, DVM

My dog behaves perfectly fine until he sees a dog or a person he wants to play with. He lunges forward, to greet them. I use my full force to make him sit and even this is difficult. What should I do to stop him from getting overly excited?

Believe it or not, the answers to these dilemmas and to a majority of basic dog behavior problems and even similar problems in cats starts with teaching Rover to say please by sitting. Not by forcing his derrier down so that his body is in a sit while his mind is chasing the squirrel. Not even by commanding him to sit, sit, sit, SIT! since this just teaches him either to count to four or to ignore the ineffective words. Rather start in a non-distracting environment with a hungry pet that knows you have bite-sized treats and just wait for him to sit.

If Rover wants the food he'll try whatever he usually does to get what he wants such as a vocalizing or jumping or climbing up your pants. Your job is to make like a tree and hold perfectly silent and still. Resist the temptation to blurt out "no" or push the pooch away from you. When Rover's regular routine does not work he may stand around a bit thinking of ways to get the treat, but eventually he'll sit on his own.

As soon as he sits, give him the treat, while he's still sitting and follow up with several more treats for remaining seated. Next move a few steps away and repeat the exercise. Practice in sets of 10 sits in a row. Most dogs quickly learn to rapidly sit up to 10 times in a minute. That means that throughout the day you can easily up to 50 rapid sits in under five minutes total. To get these rapid sits you'll need to have a bunch of treats hidden in your hand and ready to deliver. Some dogs are slow to learn at first because they're comfortable standing. It takes them longer to figure out that maybe they should sit to get the treat. If you just stay with the training and get your 10 sits per session down, even these dogs will be offering rapid sits in a day or two if they're hungry enough for the food reward you're using. Still other dogs, decide that if they can't get their treat for free they're going to blow you off and find some other form of free entertainment—such as playing with a toys or scouring the ground for new smells. You can quickly fix this low attention span by putting Rover on a hands-free leash so that he stays attached to your waist. Now when he heads off he can't go anywhere because he's attached to a human acting like a tree.

He'll soon figure out his only choice is to stand around being bored or sit and receive treats. Once Rover's performing rapid whenever you play this silent sit game, you're ready to extend his automatic polite behavior to all situations where he wants something from you such as when he want to pet him or to toss his toy, or to him into the car or out the front or to get his leash on before a walk, off at the dog park or to go over to greet other dogs. At first you'll start giving him treats for sitting following by the privilege he wants but the you'll quickly graduate to only rewarding with the privilege.

This will take good timing on your part. For instance, If Rover goes wild to get his leash on just hold his leash while he tears around the house. When this doesn't work for him, I try something

else. Since you've been practicing lots of sits, he should be thinking about sitting. You can give him a few treats for sitting or you just skip directly to putting his leash on since that's ultimately what he wants. He'll probably start to get up as you reach down with the leash or as you go to clasp the leash on. When he does, immediately withdraw the leash and stand up straight so that make it clear that only calm sit behavior causes the leash to be put on. If your timing is good he'll clearly understand this association.

This process sounds simple yet it has the potential to convert your dog to a polite pooch even in distracting situations virtually overnight. Say please by sitting teaches Rover to look to you for direction and by applying it to every situation so that Rover learns to earn everything he wants you'll teach Rover that you're the leader so he should listen to you.