

EXCITABLE

PREVENTING & REDUCING EXCITABLE DOG BEHAVIOUR

RECOGNIZING THE PROBLEM

It is normal for dogs to get excited when visitors come to the house or when going on an outing. Most dogs will settle down quickly. Dogs considered excitable are more difficult to control when they are faced with anything that makes them happy. This is good news, your dog is bursting with happiness cannot control himself when exposed to things that he loves. Excitable dogs like to chase after moving objects (such as toys), jumping up to greet, excessively bark or pull strongly on the leash, etc. These behaviors can be greatly improved with training, exercise and mental stimulation.

It is important to provide excitable dogs with lots of exercise and mental stimulation every day include walks, runs, free play and teach them impulse control.

TRAINING OPTIONS

Habituate them to the things that excite them. Giving your dog lots of exposure to the things that bring on his excitement will help to reduce the enthusiastic responses as he becomes used to them. You may think that it is easier and better to leave an excitable dog at home because he is difficult to manage. The excitable dogs should be taken on many outings to decrease the novelty and excitement they feel when encountering new and exciting places and people.

Obedience training. Impulse control training is most **important for the excitable dog**. The best method for obedience training with excitable dogs is positive reinforcement training. At minimum, your dog should know the following commands: sit, down, wait, leave it and come.

Mental stimulation. Excitable dogs tend to get bored easily. Keep them busy with “smart feeding toys”, freeze a kong stuffed with wet food and dry food, or hide treats around the house and encourage him to search for them. Teach your dog find it games or tricks or take up the sport of agility. These are great ways to provide mental stimulation

Changing your dog’s response. Your dog has likely been rewarded for excitable behaviour. Most people will touch, pat or give treats to distract their dogs. Your dog must now learn that excited behaviour results in being ignored while impulse control works.

Jumping up = no treat

Sitting = treat

CAUTIONS/REMEMBER

Never shout at or hit a dog that is overexcited. The dog is excited because he is really happy. Shouting or hitting him could cause him to associate the thing that he was happy about with the pain of being hit and create a dislike or fear. Fear is a much more difficult issue to deal with than training impulse control in an overly enthusiastic dog.

Notice and reward calm behaviour whenever possible. Even excitable dogs are sometimes relaxed. Give him a treat when laying quietly on his mat or reward him with a treat for walking nicely on the way home after a long play session at the dog park.

Training exercise for excitable dogs

Step 1 - Putting the leash on

First train a sit outside of the leashing context.

- a) Pick a time when your house is quiet. Take your dog out to pee and come back in the house. Remove his collar and leash.
- b) After a few minutes, while your dog is watching, gather treats and place them in your pocket.
- c) Pick up the leash and collar and hold them in your hand. (Your dog will get very excited because he wants to go for a walk.)
- d) Stand in one place. Ask him to sit, this may take awhile. You will need to be patient as your dog's excitability may increase at first. If he jumps up simply turn the other way. Wait patiently until he sits. When he does give him a treat and then
- e) Attempt to put the collar on. If he gets excited again, simply turn away from him and wait again. Repeat the process until he sits quiet while you put the collar on.

Step 2 - Walking out the door

- a) Put your dog on a leash and walk to the front door. Ask your dog to sit.
- b) Open it slightly. If he bolts, say "too bad" and close the door quickly.
- c) Ask him to sit again. Repeat until he stays sitting with the door open when he does reward him with a treat on the inside and then step outside.

This exercise should not be done when you are in a rush or the dog needs to pee. Most dogs catch on quickly that the reward (open door and walk) comes only when he sits.

Step 3 - Taking a walk

Note: If your dog is a strong puller it is recommended to use a front attach harness or a head harness as these can greatly reduce the pulling.

- a) Stop walking as soon as your dog pulls on the leash. Brace yourself and be like a tree to prevent him from pulling you.
- b) As soon as you get some slack in the leash reward the dog (by starting to walk again). Within seconds he will start pulling. Repeat.

You will not get very far the first few times but your dog will quickly catch on that pulling equals no walk.

Dogs that are excited should be asked to sit (and comply) before receiving any reward such as "a meal, a treat, a pat, walking out of the house, walking in the house, getting in the car and so on.