

# **Rambunctious, Jumpy, Mouthy Dogs: The Quick Fix for RJM Dogs**

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Nuisance behaviors—jumping, stealing things, trash diving, charging through the door, begging, and all the other things dogs do that drive us crazy—are deeply frustrating and can eat into the enjoyment of sharing your life with a dog. The good news is that nuisance behaviors are also easily preventable. Once we move away from the myths that every behavior is motivated by the dogs bidding for dominance, and understand what truly motivates the dog to behave the way he does, we can use this motivation to train any alternate behavior we prefer. In this presentation we discuss training solutions to train/reward opposite or competing behaviors.

## **Rambunctious, jumpy, mouthy dogs: The quick fix for RJM dogs**

So many of our dog's behaviors are normal and have evolved because of their close relationship to humans. Nonetheless, some of these behaviors can be annoying to the point of breaking the human- animal bond. It can be difficult to see how to change your course of action to get back on track with the dog. In this presentation we will discuss how to address basic issues of some common nuisance behaviors seen every day in practice (for example jumping, stealing and pulling on leash). Emphasis is placed on properly understanding and applying learning theory to improve your communication and training skills.

Nuisance behaviors—jumping, stealing things, trash diving, charging through the door, begging, and all the other things dogs can be deeply frustrating and can eat into the enjoyment of sharing our life with a dog. The good news is that nuisance behaviors are also utterly preventable and easy to fix. Once we move out of the realm of myths, like dominance, and understand what truly motivates the dog to behave the way he does, we can use this motivation to train an alternate behavior we prefer.

Jumping up, for example, is not based in dominance but normal canine greeting behavior. Most dogs are happy to see their owners and have no idea how they would prefer to be greeted. Most of the time the jumping behavior has been inadvertently and intermittently rewarded and hence strengthened the jumping over time. Owners have to understand that what is perceived as punishment, such as pushing or scolding, rarely works because attention is still given and attention is precisely what the jumping dog wants. So how are behaviors such as jumping up while being greeting decreased if we don't want to punish, which might inadvertently break the human-animal-bond or have other unintended consequences? We want the dog to be happy to see us, but we don't want the jumping. First, we have to understand that dogs have evolved a greeting ritual specifically to interact with humans. They use this ritualized "I'm happy to be meeting a familiar human" greeting to communicate varying degrees of recognition and attachment.

Mouthiness and chewing are other examples of misunderstood canine behaviors that have evolved for good reasons. Dogs have evolved using their mouth and teeth to gain access to most desirable things; chewing begins in the first few weeks of puppyhood and never stops. Food may be served once or twice a day in a bowl now, but the chewing needs still strongly exists, especially in some dogs. Initially all items in a home are fair game to a puppy, until the dog has learned to understand what is acceptable chew material to the human and what isn't.

In order to change unwanted nuisance behavior (keep in mind they are only nuisances to us, for the dog they are perfectly fine and strongly motivated behaviors – greeting, jumping, chewing) we need to understand canine motivation and learning theory. Instead of seeking to decrease these behaviors using punishment, a much preferred approach is to focus on helping our dogs learn what we would like them to do instead. For example very simply: greeting us by sitting.

## **How do we fix RJM?**

### **Management first**

In order to set up the dog for success, strict management is needed in the beginning. Initially, the owner will have to set the stage and manage the pet's environment so that the behaviors that we attempt to decrease do not get rehearsed and inadvertently, or intermittently reinforced. Managing includes having the tools and equipment ready that will help with the implementation of the management plan and the reward based training program. The list is endless, but could include items such as baby gates, kennels, crates, screen doors, window covers, leashes, tethers, head halters, front buckle harness, basket muzzle, clicker, target stick, MannersMinder, treat pouch, treats, relaxation mat, feed dispensing toys and puzzles, interactive toys, Relaxation music (Thru the dogs ear), visual entertainment (DOGTV), and many more.

NOTE: My list does NOT include anti-bark devices, shock collars, prong collars, shaker cans, throw chains and other pain and fear eliciting items – tools that help suppress behaviors rather than help teaching new positive behaviors and emotions can lead to increased fear, anxiety and aggression.

<http://avsabonline.org/resources/position-statements>

<https://vet.osu.edu/assets/pdf/hospital/behavior/trainingArticle.pdf>

## Management plan examples

To avoid:	Manage:
Jumping on visitors at the door	Put the dog in another room before they arrive
Jumping on you when entering	Place a baby gate to deny direct access to the front door
Barking at passers-by outside	Draw the curtains or restrict the dog's access to the front window
Pulling on leash	Use an anti-pull head halter or harness
Attacking the water hose	Put the dog inside while watering your plants
Chewing on furniture	Do not allow access – use a baby gate or crate

### Structuring the relationship with the pet and strengthening the human-animal-bond

#### *Aware – affirm – award approach*

There are many advantages to using this program as part of a training program for any pet. First, it is a program that fits all pets and all people, regardless of breed, age, size, gender or personality-type. It is a non-confrontational technique which is designed to never put the people or pets involved at risk. It will help to teach pets how to be better prepared to live within human society. It will help improve behavior(s) and teach the pet to learn to trust and understand people due to the predictable interactions with positive outcomes. The pet will learn to consistently follow commands at home or other low stress situations which makes it easier for him/her to follow commands in potentially challenging situations such as when guests are at the door when stranger pass by the home. Finally, it will help build confidence by providing clear communication and enjoyable outcomes for desired behaviors. This approach uses only positive, reward-based training methods to teach these valuable lessons. The program consists of 2 principles.

1. Predictable interactions with the pet based in Command – Response – Reward (C-R-R)
2. Awareness of the good/desired behaviors that will be affirmed (marked) and awarded

#### Training plan examples

To replace:	Train:
Jumping on visitors at the door	Sit on a mat next to the door before the door opened
Jumping on you when entering	Always mark and reward when he approaches and stands or sits
Barking at passers-by outside	Go get your favorite toy
Attacking the water hose	Fetch or hide-and-seek with dog toys
Chewing on furniture	Go get your favorite toy

Note the difference between managing and training the unwanted behaviors. Managing is NOT training, but nonetheless important for setting the dog up for success.

## Physical and mental stimulation

Physical exercise is fundamental and should be age appropriate.

Mental stimulation is just as crucial as physical exercise and can be implanted for a dog of any size, breed, and age and includes anything from working for food, to using food puzzles and other interesting games that engage a dog's brain and learning tricks or commands in a different language. Dogs are natural hunters and problem solvers, so the closer we can mimic this process, the less troublesome the dog will be to live with. Serving all the dog's meals in a stuffed Kong or treat ball, in a food-dispensing device, or through a game such as hide-and-seek or busy box toys can relieve many nuisance behaviors quickly.

#### Helpful hints

1. Remove all rewards/reinforcement for nuisance behaviors, i.e. ignore the dog completely and instead praise and treat the dog for sitting, being quiet, chewing on his toys, etc.
2. Be consistent. If jumping up on people is allowed some days and not on others, the dog won't understand that the rules change during the week.
3. Be persistent. After repeated reinforcement (however unintended) of a nuisance behavior, the dog won't immediately abandon his original strategy, he might even try harder first before he gives it up. This is called an extinction burst. .
4. Appreciate your dog's cleverness; some things can easily be ignored, not every unwanted behavior needs immediate intervention. Sometimes not making a big deal out of something is already enough to decrease the behavior. Get off the couch and play with your dog when he gets the old slipper you were ready to toss out anyways, if you don't he will get your expensive Italian leather shoes and that will make you jump off the couch very fast in turn you have just taught your dog that he should not bother with the slippers (or his own toys for that matter) but go directly to those yummy smelling soft leather shoes!

#### Some important terms from learning theory

##### *Motivation*

This is the force that drives all behaviors. Food, treats, attention, praise, toys, play, walks, coming along for a car ride, etc. – these can be used to reward the behaviors we like, we give them anyways it is just a questions of timing when we dish it out – when they jump or when they sit?

### ***Dominance***

Good news; no need to assert our dominance during training. It has been established for many thousands of years now that *Homo sapiens sapiens* is the dominant species and dogs don't challenge us for that position. We already control all the resources and we can now, once and for all, move on. The notion of dominance in dog training, commonly interpreted as a dog wanting to be the alpha of the pack and thus acting aggressively or assertively in some way, has been thoroughly and successfully debunked by research. Furthermore, it has been shown that implementing training techniques that employ such antiquated dominance training theory methods increase aggression.

### ***Positive reinforcement***

Any stimulus that is added after a behavior occurs that increases the likelihood of that behavior happening again.

### ***Intermittent reinforcement***

Rewarding a behavior only sometimes. Think Las-Vegas gambling effect. Intermittent reinforcement is a powerfully motivating force to all animals, including humans.

### ***Positive punishment***

Any aversive or painful stimulus that is added after a behavior occurs that decreases the likelihood of that behavior happening again.

### ***Attention seeking/getting behaviors***

Social creatures like dogs do many things to get and hold our attention. They might jump on us, paw, or steal the Italian leather shoe—obviously a high-value object guaranteed to get attention. The good news is, any dog that is highly motivated by interactions with us is in general easy to train.