

## Unruly Behaviour – Jumpy, Mouthy Dogs

It can be very challenging dealing with a persistently jumpy, mouthy dog. They literally erupt into over-aroused behaviour such as jumping up on us and/or grabbing at our clothes, hands, arms and legs. As well, they may have a habit of biting the leash while we're walking, turning a pleasant outing into a tug of war. Dogs that display this kind of unruly behaviour are easily triggered by excitement, frustration, or boredom. It tends to occur during or after play, when seeing people and other dogs they want to meet, and when the dog is demanding but not getting the attention they want from us.

Usually, our instinctive response to our dogs' jumping up or mouthing is to push them off and tell them "get down!" Unintentionally, we are reinforcing this behaviour. Even if we aren't pleased with what they're doing, we're still touching them, looking at them, or talking to them, and that is perceived as a good thing by the dog. They learn that jumping and mouthing is a fun way to get you to engage with them and react. (For more on this, please refer to THS's [How Dogs Learn](#) information sheet.)



### How is unruly behaviour managed?

There are many ways to curb mouthing and jumping behaviours in your dog:

- You can leave a drag leash attached to your dog when they are inside the home and under supervision. This makes it much easier to get the dog under control if they attempt to jump up and mouth. You can do this outside as well, leaving a drag leash on your dog when they are loose in the back yard with you.
- Reinforce all calm, polite interactions with your dog. They learn that having four paws on the floor earns them a reward.
- Be observant of your dog's body language. Pay attention to behaviour cues before the dog escalates so that you can begin to predict their jumping and mouthing. Consider context, as well. When you finish playing an energetic game, is your dog still excited and ready to jump? Try shorter play sessions, stopping before the dog ramps up. If you're on a work call, does your dog begin to demand your attention, pushing their nose under your hand or pawing at your leg? This could be a prelude to an episode of mouthing; instead of engaging with the dog, you need to ignore them or redirect their attention.
- Treats work wonders and can really help focus your dog, especially if they are highly food motivated. See if you can prevent jumping and mouthing by cueing your dog to perform an alternative or replacement behaviour before the escalation occurs. Ask for "touch", "sit", "paw", etc., to get your dog's brain going down a different path.
- Do not engage if your dog does escalate: Fold your arms close to your body so they are out of reach, look away, turn your body away, and do not speak. Once your dog stops jumping and mouthing (wait a few seconds), you can then turn back and give them a small treat or verbal reward in a calm voice. A quick, gentle pat is okay, but be aware that too much handling may cause them to begin jumping and mouthing again.



## **Extinction burst**

As a side note, you may notice that your dog's unruly behaviour may become even more determined the first few times you ignore them. This is called an "extinction burst", meaning they're thinking, "Hey! Why isn't this working? I guess I'll just push a little harder to see if I can get a reaction out of them!" This is normal, and should subside if you are consistent and can hang in there!

## **What if ignoring the dog isn't working?**

Dogs may get to a point of over-arousal where it's really hard to defuse the behaviour that is occurring. If your dog continues to jump up and mouth you even while you are ignoring them, you may have to exit the room entirely and give your dog a chance to cool down. If you re-enter and your dog is still excited, exit again and wait a little bit longer. Your dog will eventually learn that what normally was "fun" and reinforcing no longer elicits that same experience and will look for interactions that do – those calm, polite behaviours that you've been reinforcing!

If you are still having difficulties with jumping and mouthing, reach out to a certified trainer for help, as the more your dog practises this behaviour, the more likely it will continue and escalate.

