

How can I determine if my dog is just acting like a "puppy" or is too excitable or disobedient?

Many excitable and rowdy behaviours that we see in puppies will diminish with time and proper early training. Dogs that are unruly or difficult for the owner display behaviours such as: not responding to commands, pulling on a leash, jumping on people, continually barking for attention, steals things or generally wreaking havoc on the household. The problem is compounded in large dogs because of their size.

Can I identify this type of dog as a puppy?

Excitable and disobedient dogs can often be identified in early puppy hood. These puppies continually mouth owner's hands and resist attempts to influence them for even the most minor procedures. Many people do not realize why puppies chew on them and so give the incorrect feedback to influence the behaviour (see our handout on *Puppy Nipping and Rough Play*).

How can I prevent my puppy from becoming a disobedient dog?

- Vigorous and frequent appropriate exercise
- Start training the first day you get your puppy
- Attend puppy class (ideally starting at ~12 weeks old)
- Use positive reinforcement, be fair teach your puppy what you expect
- Several short sessions are better than one long session in a day

I have tried training my dog without success. What went wrong?

- You may be inadvertently making training and reinforcement errors.
- You need to set your dog up so that they can be successful. Quiet, calm, and non-demanding behaviours should be rewarded with play, affection and attention, while demanding, jumping up, or excitable behaviours should be met with inattention.
- Instead of patting, giving attention, or perhaps even a treat to try and stop the behaviour, it is essential that these behaviours are ignored or redirected to something appropriate.
- Do not repeat commands. When you ask your dog to do something, be sure that you can get the dog to perform the behaviour. Do not ask for a behaviour unless you know that your dog can perform it on command. Set your dog up for success.
- Reprimands and punishment are also often unsuccessful. Punishment may reward behaviour by providing attention. Punishment that is too harsh may lead to anxiety, fear of the owner and problems such as aggression or submissive urination.
- Treat all demanding behaviour with inattention (or disruption techniques) and reward calm, non-demanding behaviour with play and attention.

How should I start to regain influence?

Retraining begins with good influence, and a clear understanding of the proper use, timing and selection of rewards. An obedience training class that uses rewards and non-disciplinary techniques for influence is a good start. Ask for the Calgary Humane Society's handout on *Punishment and Positive Reinforcement*. One important concept to remember, unless you provide rewards within a few seconds of the desired behaviour, or punish the pet as the behaviour is occurring, dogs may know that you are happy or angry, but they do not know about what!! Punishment after the act does no good, confuses the dog, and can even lead to the kinds of disobedient behaviours that owners find objectionable. Remember, you want to punish the BEHAVIOUR, not the PET.

What do I do if disobedience and unruliness persists?

Seek help from a professional dog trainer or attend a class that uses positive reinforcement. Often it is difficult to understand what you are doing wrong and help from a professional can really make you understand what you are doing and help build the relationship with your dog.

Now that I have more influence, what else do I need to do?

An integral component of influencing an unruly dog entails restructuring the situation so that the unruly behaviour is not able to take place, or that interruption is immediate. This can take various forms such as: keeping the dog on leash so that it cannot run through the house, closing doors to other rooms and limiting the access of the dog to areas where he is unsupervised, only interacting with the dog in a positive manner and setting up situations so that the dog will do what you want.

This brings up another vital issue in influencing excitable and disobedient dogs. Many owners are so frustrated that the only interaction that they have with the dog is negative. They have lost the joy of pet ownership. Worse than that, they do not reward the behaviours that they do want. It is just as important to tell the dog when it is doing the correct behaviour as to using management and redirection for inappropriate behaviours. It is also important to practice the training that you may ultimately need. An example of this is training your dog to sit and stay in the front hall. How will your dog know to sit and not run out the door when people come to visit, (a highly excitable event), if your dog never practiced doing so when things were calm?

TEACH YOUR DOG WHAT YOU WANT IT TO KNOW BEFORE YOU NEED IT.