

## INAPPROPRIATE ATTENTION SEEKING BEHAVIORS

No one wants their dog to jump up on people or bark for attention. But, like children acting out in school, any attention is better than none. Even if the dog gets yelled at, it's receiving attention—which is rewarding. The goals here are to reduce rewarding inappropriate behavior and to increase rewarding desired behavior.

**I. Counterconditioning:** Counterconditioning means substituting appropriate behaviors (which are rewarded) for inappropriate behaviors (no longer rewarded). A dog can't jump, mouth, or bark, if it's sitting quietly. Every person in the home, even visitors, should participate in this training. As always, consistency is the key. The dog needs to have clear signals in order to learn to discriminate between acceptable and unacceptable behaviors. One side note: you may want wear a heavy coat and long pants before entering, to protect your arms and legs from scratches. These can be kept just outside the door.

1. Don't fuss over the dog when you first come home. (Note—this is *only* for inappropriate attention seekers. Well mannered dogs *can* be fussed over!) The dog should be completely ignored as long as it is acting "hyper." This can take several forms:
2. Come in the home. Stand with your back to the door (don't walk in further). Cross your arms, stare into space, and ignore the dog completely while it jumps and carries on. Don't look at the dog—that's a reward--look up or away.
3. As soon as the dog stops for an instant, say "Good dog! Now, Sit!" When the dog sits (you can use treats to train this), give treats, praise, and pet the dog. Most likely, the dog will jump up again as soon as it gets this attention. Go back to ignoring the dog until it stops (this may take a while—it's called the "frustration effect.") Then use the "Sit" command and reward again.
4. Move into the room. Ignore any attention seeking. *Really* ignore the dog, turn your back, and stare at the ceiling. The dog may move in front of you. Don't spin, just keep looking up. Make absolutely no eye contact. The instant the dog stops, say "Good dog! Sit," and give the dog attention for obeying. If the dog gets too excited again, re-implement the ignoring-period.

**II. Long-Attention Span Treats:** A second way is to give the dog something else to do. Buy long attention-span treats such as a Velvet Buda Bone®, a Kong® filled with treats, or some similar object. Any time a person enters the home, that person should show this treat, say "Sit" and give the dog the treat for complying. This will distract the dog until the person is settled, and give the dog something else to do besides demand attention. This, in combination with the above training, should eliminate the problem behaviors.

### Things to Know:

1. The dog will first *get worse* instead of better. This is called the "Frustration effect" in science. It is like when a candy machine breaks: You put in money, push buttons, but nothing comes out. What do we do? We push harder, hit the coin return button, shake the machine, even kick the machine!!! Eventually, we give up. That's an example of the frustration effect. Well, the attention the dog gets for jumping, mouthing, or other inappropriate behaviors, is the dog's "candy." When it doesn't come, the dog "kicks" the machine—jumps harder and so on.
2. Follow the program until the dog consistently presents the desired behavior. If someone slips just a little, gives the dog even negative attention for the undesired behaviors, it's gotten its candy again. And we're back at the beginning (well, almost).
3. Once the dog has learned that no "candy" is forthcoming, it will show the inappropriate behaviors less often, and for shorter periods of time. It will show the desired behaviors sooner, until it offers those first, instead of the jumping/mouthing/scratching. Then we are on our way to success.
4. The dog has *not* "unlearned" or forgotten the inappropriate behavior. After several days, the dog may show "spontaneous recovery" of the undesired behavior (in fact, this is *very* likely). Don't be frustrated—this is normal and retraining is required. Over time, spontaneous recoveries will decrease and completely disappear. *However*, if someone gives attention for inappropriate behavior again, the dog will have to be retrained a little bit again. Don't despair—this is normal—and just has to be worked through.
5. Over a period of weeks you should see a gradual decline in the attention seeking behavior. But keep in mind that if some people refuse to implement the program, the program will take longer. Consistency is very important.