

Training a Dog's Calm Response to the Doorbell

The goal is to train your dog to move away from the door when the doorbell rings (or someone knocks, or in condo situations when the door-phone rings). This will give you the opportunity to block their access to outside when you open the door, and to change their responses to positive behavior rather than “frenzied” behavior. We are going to teach them that, when the doorbell rings, they are to run to the kitchen and receive a treat. You will then be able to use a child-gate to restrain them in the kitchen while you answer the door. Do many sessions. They don't need to be longer than 10-15 minutes, but the more sessions you do, the faster the dog will learn. You can start with each dog singly if you want, then pairs, and then the whole group. We want to not only teach them to run to the kitchen when the doorbell rings, but also to desensitize them to the sound of the doorbell and you opening the door. You will need:

- a. Child-gate that opens on a hinge (swinging gate).
- b. Person willing to cooperate by ringing your door many times.
- c. Very, very desirable treats, such as cut up hot dog, beef jerky pieces, et cetera.

I. Run to the Kitchen:

Start by standing next to the door. Have someone outside ring the doorbell (or knock). When the doorbell rings, get vocally excited and run to the kitchen. Say something like “Oh Good! The doorbell—time for treats!” in a happy voice. Have the dog run to follow you (make it a game). Give it treats for coming to the kitchen. Show it the treats (“up close and personal” so that it is eager to attend to you). Do this for 5-15 trials. Do not go to the door. Repeat this step until the dog consistently runs to the kitchen with you.

II. Run to the Kitchen from Part-Way There:

Once the dog is running to the kitchen with you when you are standing next to the door, begin to stand slightly nearer to the kitchen instead. You can start two steps away or halfway away, depending on how the dog is doing. However, station the dog next to the door. (The person on the other side may need to call to it to keep the dog there instead of following you.) Then follow the same exact procedures as in Step I., above. Call the dog to you very excitedly and run to the kitchen to give treats. As the dog continues to run to the kitchen with you, start further and further away from the door. Don't move to Step III until it is consistently heading for the kitchen from right next to the door (with you far away). Do this at each distance for 5- 15 trials, over several short sessions until performance is consistently good.

III. Be in the Kitchen:

Be in your kitchen. When the person rings the doorbell, give the dog a couple of seconds to come to you on its own. If it doesn't come after a brief wait (but don't wait too long—only 1-5 seconds, at first), call it to you. Be excited about having the dog come to you. Give it treats. Do this for 5-15 trials until performance is, again, consistently good. Do *not* go to the door.

IV. Run to the Kitchen and then Answer the Door:

After the dog is responding well to Step III, above, continue the same training only add one more step. Use a child gate to keep your dog in the kitchen while you go to the door to answer it. You can give the dog a bone or a rawhide chew, if you like, to encourage it to enjoy staying in the kitchen. Do this many times over several sessions.