



Rutland Dog Training

www.rutlanddogtraining.co.uk

When jumping up is bringing you down by Adam Beral

I have an 18 month old Flat Coated Retriever called Harley. He has jumped up for attention since he was a puppy, but the other day he knocked my elderly mother over in his excitement. How can I teach him not to jump up on people?

Jumping up is commonly quoted as being 'undesirable' in our furry friends, yet it is one of the simpler behaviours to eradicate. As you have highlighted, it can be potentially very dangerous and I would advise you take immediate steps to prevent another accident occurring. You may want to attach Harley to a lead when visitors come, or remove him to another room until he has made some progress in his training.

The reason dogs jump up is normally because they associate human hands and faces as sources of attention (after all, how much attention does the average dog receive from shoes?) Couple this with a well rehearsed tendency to jump up to reach their mother's teat or muzzle and the behaviour tends to become securely embedded. However, the initial reasons soon become lost as jumping up becomes a *learned behaviour*.

Behaviours only become learnt if they are *reinforced*. Since you say Harley has jumped up since he was a puppy, I would guess that you have inadvertently reinforced his behaviour. I imagine that you, like most other owners, didn't prevent Harley from jumping up when he was a cute little puppy! When does Harley receive more attention, when he is on the floor or when he is jumping up? The answer is almost certainly when he is jumping up, even if it is simply because it is hard to ignore a large dog when their front paws are on your shoulders!

This is why the traditional advice (to ignore your dog when he jumps up) rarely works. It is nigh on impossible to ignore a big dog jumping up on you, not least at the times when you are feeling far from patient after a long day. Then there is the further problem of convincing every visitor, however well-dressed they may be, to 'just ignore the behaviour'.

The solution is to *counter condition* Harley to do something that he simply cannot do at the same time as jumping up. The usual choice is a sit. By having a rock solid sit, you can engineer a situation where Harley gets no attention when he jumps up and instead has a sit reinforced with huge amounts of calm attention, praise and treats. Should he then jump up again, remove all attention and ask him to sit again. He will soon make the connection and realise that sitting is a far quicker way to get the attention he is asking for!



Rutland Dog Training

www.rutlanddogtraining.co.uk

At the same time, it may be useful to teach a 'stop jumping up' command. Avoid words like 'down' which already mean something to Harley and instead go for a new command such as 'off'. When Harley is calm, invite him to put his paws on your lap whilst you are sat on the couch. Praise him, then stand up and say 'off' as he removes his paws. Praise him and treat him. Ask him to sit and treat him again.

Always think ahead and set yourself up to win: be aware of the times when Harley is very likely to jump up and put a lead on him in advance. This allows you to control his training and ensures the safety of visitors. Better still, set the situation up by getting a family member or close friend to come to the front door. Consider leaving some dog treats in your car so that you can grab them as you come in from work and do two minutes training at a time when Harley is likely to jump up at you.

The secret of successful dog training lies in *clarity* and *consistency*. Dogs need rules and boundaries in the same way as children do. Make sure that the rules are the same in every situation and with every member of your household. If you are inconsistent, Harley will soon realise that once in a while jumping up is rewarded and therefore it will remain part of his behavioural repertoire. If you are consistent and never allow jumping up, the behaviour will soon disappear due to lack of reinforcement (beware: Harley will find any attention reinforces the behaviour, either positive or negative, so avoid actively telling him off as much as praising him when he jumps up).

As always, the advice given is only a guide and although it will work in most situations, there may be other reasons your dog is jumping up. Remember, safety is paramount. If you cannot control your dog's problem behaviour on your own, it is time to seek help from a professional dog behaviourist who is registered with the Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors. If you haven't already, seek out some local dog training classes to teach Harley some basic manners. Both can be found on my website www.rutlanddogtraining.co.uk

Originally published in the Rutland & Stamford Mercury, 13th August 2010