

Say Goodbye to Begging, Leash Pulling, and Jumping

These are the 'Big Three' most undesirable doggie habits hated by dog parents and their friends. They're hard to stop and easy to reignite, so you may be tempted to give it up. But have hope, your dog can exhibit pride-inducing canine behavior if you use these tools and techniques.

Reviewed by [Dr. Becker](#)

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Three highly undesirable dog behaviors — begging for food, jumping on people and leash pulling — can be difficult to extinguish and easy to “untrain”
- An otherwise healthy, well-fed dog needs to be consistently ignored when she begs, and distracted with short training sessions and other positive pursuits
- Jumping dogs need to be taught a replacement behavior that is equally motivating
- Dogs who pull while on leash need to be taught (or retaught) proper leash manners
- Consistency is your best friend and the key to success when training or extinguishing behaviors in your dog

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Experts generally agree that a dog's behavior is almost always linked to something his owner, caretaker and/or trainer did or didn't do at some point in his life. Interestingly, there are three behaviors in particular that most dog parents don't appreciate but may be unintentionally reinforcing: begging, jumping and leash pulling.

These behaviors have been driving pet parents bonkers forever, and they seem almost impossible to extinguish — perhaps because it's actually easier to inadvertently encourage them than to train dogs not to perform them, and once trained, it's also easy to undo your hard work.

The Beggar

Most dogs are good eaters, which is a nice way of saying they'll eat anything that isn't nailed down. Dr. Jules Benson, Vice President of Veterinary Services at Petplan Pet Insurance, explains the phenomenon this way:

"Looking at the domestic dog's nearest wild relative, the grey wolf, they are adapted to a feast-or-famine diet and can go many days without fresh prey. They achieve this through eating large amounts when food is available, food caching (may be analogous to burying bones in the garden!) and scavenging (watch out for the kitchen trash can!)."

In other words, it's natural for our canine companions to eat whenever food is around, and not necessarily because they're hungry right that second, but because they're never 100% sure meals will continue to be available like clockwork every day of their lives. Sadly, it's also possible some formerly abused or neglected dogs harbor memories of starvation from earlier life experiences and will forever view food as a rare and precious resource.

With that said, assuming your dog is otherwise healthy and eating a nutritionally balanced, species-appropriate diet containing the right number of daily calories to maintain her ideal body weight, it's reasonable to assume the begging is a learned behavior, meaning you've reinforced it often enough that it's now a habit. Tips and tricks for dealing with a begging dog:

- **Ignore the begging** — You need to stop responding to her begging or she'll never stop begging. In addition, you run the risk of making her overweight with too much food and/or treats. Giving in just once can undo all your hard work up to that point.
- **Use her food obsession to train her** — At least once a day hold short training sessions with your dog. She'll very likely learn new commands and tricks quickly once she realizes snacks are involved. Be sure to use very small portions of healthy treats, for example, frozen peas or tiny squares of cheese.
- **Be her food substitute** — In other words, as often as possible, distract her from begging. Get in some playtime; take her for a nice **walk**, a ride in the car or a trip to the dog park.

At the end of the day, it's all about loving your dog more than your dog loves food by not giving in to her food-seeking behavior. The most loving thing you can do is to consistently redirect her energy and focus toward training, exercise, playtime and other non-food related activities.

The Jumper

Unlike other undesirable behaviors that can be ignored when necessary, it's nearly impossible to not react to a dog who's jumping up on you. "Reacting to a leaping dog is almost reflexive," writes dog trainer Victoria Shade, "and that's exactly how jumping up becomes a habit."² And as veterinary behaviorist Dr. Valarie Tynes explains in an article for veterinary journal dvm360:

"Many dogs are highly motivated to greet people by getting close to their faces. In most cases, kneeling or kicking such a dog is less powerful than the dog's desire to greet people by jumping on them."³ (These dogs are the canine version of people who greet everyone they meet with a big hug and a kiss.)

Since not everyone the jumping dog meets responds to his behavior with a knee or a kick (thank goodness), the **punishment** he receives is intermittent, and therefore ineffective. In addition, there are dogs who don't perceive being kneed as punishment, but rather reinforcement because they're receiving attention, albeit negative attention.

Kneeing a jumping dog or worse, kicking him as a form of punishment (or simply to keep him off you) doesn't teach him a more acceptable behavior to replace the unacceptable one. In addition, you can cause injury to the dog and/or yourself using your knee or foot against him. And there's also the issue of unintentionally reinforcing the bad behavior because you're paying attention to him when he jumps.

This dog needs a replacement behavior that is equally motivating. Tynes suggests **teaching him to sit** to greet everyone. Sitting becomes the alternative behavior that gets rewarded with petting and/or a food treat.

While he's being taught to sit to greet people, it's important to stop reacting when he jumps on you. Turn your back, stand straight and ignore him. This is the opposite of what he wants (attention) and sends the message that you don't welcome his exuberant jumping routine.

The Leash Puller

This is such a natural behavior for most dogs that it's easy to overlook, especially if you're walking a small- or medium-sized dog whose tugging doesn't threaten to pull your arm from its socket. But if you allow it, your dog will learn very quickly to interpret leash tension as the signal to go full speed ahead.

Leash pulling is not only annoying, but dangerous. If the leash is attached to your dog's collar, it can cause injury to his throat, neck or back. If he's a large or giant breed, he can cause you injury, and even pull you off your feet. These are the general steps involved in training your dog to walk on leash:

- Allow him to walk around dragging the leash for a bit, then pick up the opposite end. Let him lead you for a few seconds while you hold the line just off the ground. Slow down so he's forced to slow down, ultimately to a stop. Take a short break for praise and affection.
- Next, let him trail the line again, but when you pick up your end this time, call him and stand still. If he pulls, hold your ground without pulling him in your direction. The goal is to teach him to put slack in the line himself by moving toward you. When he puts slack in the line, praise him and call him to you.
- If he comes all the way to you, deliver more praise and a **training treat**. If he stops on his way to you, tighten the line just enough to apply a tiny bit of pull to it. Immediately call him to come again. Give praise as he moves toward you and treats when he comes all the way back. Two or three repetitions are all many dogs need to understand lack of tension in the line is what earns praise and treats.
- When your dog has learned to come towards you to relieve tension on the line, you can begin backing up as he's coming towards you to keep him moving.
- Next, turn and walk forward so he's following you. If he passes you, head in another direction so he's again behind you. The goal is to teach him to follow on a loose lead.

Depending on your pet's temperament, five- to 15-minute sessions are sufficient in the beginning. Practice controlling your dog on the lead for 30-second intervals during each session. The very first second you begin leash training, make sure your dog accomplishes nothing by pulling on his line.

It takes some dogs longer than others to learn to keep the leash loose. Exercise patience and don't engage in a battle of wills with him. Don't snap, yank or otherwise use the line for correction or punishment. Stop before either of you gets frazzled or tired. After each short session on the lead, liberally praise your dog and spend a few minutes playing ball or some other game he enjoys.

No matter what you're trying to train your dog to do or not do, consistency is the key to success. If your mind is often elsewhere during interactions with your dog, in an instant you can begin to unravel days or weeks or even months of training — especially with the three behaviors discussed above.

Sources and References

¹ | [Heart Dogs, August 20, 2020](#)

² [PetMD, December 14, 2018](#)

³ [Client handout: Why punishment fails, and what works better](#)
