



## **Managing High Energy and Arousal in Dogs**

High energy dogs are frequently adolescents or those with pent up stress or anxiety. Their arousal can be triggered by different things like intense play sessions or seeing other dogs on walks. When in a state of high arousal these dogs can show poor judgement or impulse control. This results in displaying some or all of the following behaviors:

- Barking
- Jumping
- Mouthing
- Leash biting
- Mounting
- Spinning

## **Physical and Mental Outlets**

This type of dog may need help channeling their energy into more desirable behaviors. The following guidelines can help prevent the behaviors from happening in the first place and will set you and your dog up for success.

### **Provide Ample Enrichment**

Under stimulation or boredom can often cause or exacerbate behavior issues, especially things like jumping, mouthing or pulling on leash. Be sure to provide more than enough things for your dog to do so they can have outlets for their mental and physical energy. Keep items rotated so they stay novel and interesting.

Enrichment is a great way to give these often smart and busy dogs ways to stay busy, solve problem, and use their body and brains to expel that excess energy. For these dogs, we always recommend using only food puzzle toys for meals to give them a natural opportunity to work while also staying busy at least once a day. Some options for puzzle toys might be:

- Kong Wobbler
- Starmark Bob-a-lot
- Kong Gyro
- Original Kong: Fill with peanut butter, cream cheese or wet food and freeze for a longer-lasting, high-value treat
- Drill holes in the side of a PVC pipe, fill with kibble, and put a cap on both ends. You can use this for mealtimes or a fun activity to do with treats.
- Make a foraging box by stuffing a cardboard box, paper towel or toilet paper roll with newspaper and treats hidden inside. Simply close the box or pinch the ends of the roll and allow your dog to dig, chew and toss them around to figure out how to get to the treats out.
- Fill a muffin tin with kibble. Put tennis balls to cover the food for added difficulty.

## Physical Exercise

Always make sure that your dog has had an opportunity to get out their energy before you ask them to try to practice calm or low-arousal activities. Some ways to do that might be:

- A hike down a nature trail where they can explore the world around them and take in all the new smells.
- A neighborhood walk- Be sure to let your dog sniff every chance they get. Sniffing is naturally calming for dogs and helps lower arousal and flood their brain with information to process, further expelling energy, even while they are standing still.
- Play with a frisbee or play a game of fetch in the yard.
- Play with a flirt lure.
- Hire a dog walker, if needed.

## Training

The primary way to modify these behaviors are to manage the environment and catch and reward all quiet, calm behaviors around things they have gotten excited about in the past. Here are some strategies that will help you may find helpful. If you see signs of anxiety or your dog's frustration increasing, you should look to modify your plan.

As you begin, be sure to reward for even the smallest moments of calm and move them away if they get too excited and begin to fail. If they are jumping or getting overly excited, they should be taken back several steps.

- Always reinforce your dog for appropriate behavior. Begin play sessions, praise, or give your dog a treat every time you see them resting, playing by themselves with toys, or keeping four feet on the ground when greeting.
- Keep treats with you at all times when entering the house so that you can use every opportunity possible to practice. As soon as you enter and before they have an opportunity to jump, reward! Catching it before they jump and feeding consistently until they are no longer excited is key.
- Always offer treats at floor level- Rewarding your dog calmly and on the ground is a great way to keep their attention towards the ground.
- Bring high value treats before going into situations where they have gotten over excited in in the past. Remain at a level where they can be successful and reward every time they display calm behavior. If they get too excited, reset and try again at a further distance from whatever they are excited about. Once your dog has started to learn that they are rewarded for calm or quiet behavior, you can start to extend the amount of time between treats or rewards.
- Avoid encouraging jumping or mouthing by continuing to play when these behaviors are exhibited. Preparing and reminding any visitors is also important as they sometimes inadvertently set owners back in training.
- Eliminate the opportunity- Avoid situations where you know your dog cannot be successful. Putting them away before people come over and bringing them out once everyone is settled is a great way to avoid excitement at the door. Similar strategies can be used for various types of situations.

- Provide another outlet- if they jump and leash bite when exiting the house, bring along a toy to calmly give them as an alternative option.
- Train calming cues using positive reinforcement training.
- Teach them young- Even if it's cute when they are young, focus heavily on teaching your puppy to keep four paws on the floor when meeting people or doing fun things. It can be extremely confusing and frustrating for dogs who have been rewarded the entire duration of their lives for jumping only to have it become a behavior that they are told not to do when they get bigger and it is no longer desirable. Set everyone up for success by teaching your puppy good things happen when they stay on the ground.

### **When Your Dog Does Get Overly Excited**

- **Take notes-** Take notes about when, where, and why your dog started displaying overly aroused behaviors. Use this information to modify your plan to ensure you can reduce the difficulty and set them up for success the next time.
- **Walk away-** Refrain from giving your dog attention while they are displaying overly aroused behaviors. Any attention, even attention from punishment, further reinforces the behavior and will cause it to increase overall.
- **Be consistent-** Be sure everyone in the household knows the plan. The more consistent everyone is, the faster the dog will learn and the less time it will take to resolve.
- **Be patient-** Remember that it might take a while for your dog to learn this kind of self-control, especially if they are busy, active or highly intelligent dogs by nature.

### **When to Seek Additional Help**

If you believe your dog is displaying these behaviors out of excitement, these guidelines can be helpful. However, if your dog is showing any signs of fear, aggression or is barking at dogs, other animals, or when you leave the house, there may be an underlying issue that you need to resolve first. In those cases, you should consult with a Certified Veterinary Behaviorist and/or a Certified Professional Dog Trainer so they can evaluate your situation and get you a plan that is appropriate for you and your pet.

The two main organizations where you can search a database to find certified trainers near you is the Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers or the International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants. If you are seeing more severe signs of distress listed above and are looking for a Board-Certified Veterinary Behaviorist, you should search the American College of Veterinary Behaviorists website to search for the closest behaviorist near you.