

Turns Your Dog Into a 4-Legged Troublemaker in a Shockingly Short Time

Does your dog show these problem behaviors? It's probably this. Yet pet parents are often blissfully ignorant of this hidden role in this troublesome state of affairs. Fortunately, all three are easier to fix than you think.

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Most “bad” dog behavior, for example, hyperactivity, leash pulling and jumping, is rooted in something a human did or didn’t do during many previous interactions with the dog
- Hyperactivity is rare in animals; most “hyperactive” dogs tend to be under-exercised and lack adequate mental stimulation
- Leash pulling is somewhat natural in dogs, but almost any dog can be trained to keep slack in the leash
- Jumping up is often the doggy equivalent of greeting people with a big hug and kiss; you can extinguish this behavior by teaching your dog an alternative positive behavior
- Another option is to teach your dog the "off" command. If he jumps, give the command, and then reward him once all four paws are touching the floor

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Most animal behavior experts agree that undesirable canine conduct can almost always be linked to something a human in the dog's life did or didn't do, either intentionally or accidentally. In fact, many dog parents are shocked to learn the behavior that drives them craziest about their dog is actually a behavior they've inadvertently encouraged!

Three examples of unwanted behaviors that are actually the result of human interaction (or lack of appropriate interaction) with dogs are so-called hyperactivity, pulling at the leash and jumping up on people.

Hyperactivity

The term "hyperactive" is used all the time these days by pet parents of very active dogs. But despite the popularity of the term, the clinical syndrome of hyperactivity is actually quite rare in pets.

Veterinarians and animal behaviorists agree most symptoms of hyperactivity that dog parents complain about are actually either breed-specific behaviors, conditioned behaviors, behaviors resulting from a lack of appropriate physical or mental stimulation or a combination. It's important to recognize the difference between canine behavior that is abnormal, and behavior that is actually normal given the dog's circumstances, but undesirable.

There are many things that can affect your pet's behavior, including whether she's alone or ignored much of the time, isn't getting enough exercise or hasn't received obedience training. It's also possible she's been conditioned through your repeated and possibly unintentional responses to use physical activity to get attention, or is punished for unwanted behavior instead of rewarded for desired behavior.

If you notice your dog is much easier on your nerves after she's been to the dog park or has run around the backyard with your kids for an hour, you can draw the logical conclusion that burning off physical and mental energy has a positive effect on her behavior. Dogs who don't get their daily needs met for activity, social interaction, mental stimulation and **environmental enrichment** may appear to be hyperactive as they attempt to fulfill those needs within the constraints of their environment.

Correcting the behavior: Since very few dogs are clinically hyperactive, evaluate your dog's lifestyle from every angle as a first step.

- Make sure she's getting plenty of rigorous exercise until SHE tells YOU she's tired. Choose activities your dog enjoys so she's excited about participating.
- Provide mental stimulation with puzzles, treat-release toys, hikes, swims and other outdoor activities that appeal to your dog's natural instincts.
- Focus on desired behaviors your dog performs rather than on what you don't want her to do. Dogs respond to positive reinforcement behavior modification, which does not include punishment.
- Enroll your dog in an obedience class or an activity that helps her focus, such as nose work.
- Feed your dog a nutritionally balanced, species-appropriate diet to avoid food intolerances, amino acid deficiencies (tryptophan deficiency is common in homemade diets and can negatively affect behavior) and allergies common in dogs fed low-quality commercial pet food. Veterinarians underestimate how often food sensitivity contributes to restless, hyperactive behavior.
- Discuss supplements such as L-theanine, ashwagandha, rhodiola, GABA, melatonin, hops, chamomile, valerian root, flower essences and **CBD oil** as good starting points with your integrative vet if your pet has been diagnosed with anxiety or hyperactivity.

Pulling on Leash

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 neck or back. If he's a large or giant breed, he can cause you injury, and even pull you off your feet.

Correcting the behavior: 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, more praise and a training treat are in order. 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 that 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.

Jumping

Sometimes when dog parents are first getting to know their new puppy or adult dog, the jumping thing can be kind of appealing. Your new furry family member is clearly over the moon to see you, and what's not to love about that? So you laugh when he does it, and pet him as you push him off you, or wait 'til HE decides to get down.

The result? Jasper the jumper learns that a) you enjoy it when he jumps, and b) he gets attention when he jumps. His jumping behavior has been rewarded and reinforced. Inevitably the time comes when Jasper must learn to keep all four paws on the ground. A jumping dog can pose a threat to people who aren't steady on their feet, people holding or carrying something, friends and strangers wearing nice clothing, small children and others.

Correcting the behavior: Kneeing a jumping dog or worse, kicking him as a form of punishment (or simply to keep him off you) is unproductive because he isn't learning 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.

There's also the issue of unintentionally reinforcing the bad behavior because you're paying attention to him when he jumps. The dog needs a replacement behavior that is equally motivating, for example, 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. Eventually, your dog will realize a nice sit gets him the attention he was seeking by jumping. Another option is to teach your dog the "off" command. If he jumps, give the command, and then reward him once all four paws are touching the floor.

Sources and References

[PetMD, August 11, 2016 \(Archived\)](#)

