

Boroughbred Behavior Resources



Issue: Basic Manners and Impulse Control

What does this mean?

When bringing a new dog into your home there will always be a period of time when everyone, dog and human, is adjusting to each other. In some cases, the dog you bring home may not have experienced formal training or learned what we might call 'manners.' This can present differently for different dogs, with some jumping up in a social manner, taking treats more roughly, snatching toys from your hand, or other similar unwanted behavior that is not overtly concerning but will require some attention in the new home.

What do I do?

First and foremost, if you have the means to work with a positive reinforcement trainer and this is your preference, this is a great way to go. The trainer can work with your dog to help them not only gain some impulse control and learn basic manners, but also teach cues with associated behaviors (like sit, down, and stay).

If you prefer to work on this yourself, there are lots of ways you can work on manners and impulse control that will help you and your dog have a more harmonious life together.

One of the main behaviors we see with dogs that have little to no training is jumping up on people. If this is in a soft and social manner, meaning the dog has a loose wiggly body and relaxed stance, then the best thing to do is simply turn your back when your dog jumps up. If you don't give your dog attention when they jump up and only give attention and treats when they are calm and have all four paws on the floor, your dog will quickly learn not to jump up. They will associate jumping up with a lack of attention (you turning your back) and associate calm, appropriate behavior with attention and treats and positive rewards. Make sure to reward your dog with the attention they are seeking when they stop jumping, so they learn both what you don't want and what you do want.

Another way to work on basic impulse control is to hold a piece of your dogs' normal kibble in one hand, leaving your hand open with flat palm. If your dog goes for the kibble just close your hand firmly and ignore any pawing, licking or demanding for the kibble. When your dog eventually on their own sits and looks at you, immediately open you hand and offer the kibble! Repeat this multiple times and work on it every day if you can. This type of training will teach your dog to be calm and look at you for instruction, thus teaching them the basics of impulse control.

What not to do!

The main thing to remember is not to punish your dog for unwanted behavior! This can create negative associations for your dog and cause additional behavioral problems. Instead, ignore unwanted behaviors (jumping, barking, etc.) and reward desirable behaviors (calm behavior, eye contact, etc.). This way, if you get the timing wrong, all that happens is your dog gets a few extra treats, and any one-on-one sessions will cultivate a stronger bond between you and your dog.

We caution against the use of aversive tools or trainers who describe themselves as aversive, balanced, or mixed-method. Aversive tools include things like shock collars, prong collars, and choke chains – tools that teach through fear, pain, and intimidation. Aversive techniques do not change a dog's emotional response to stimuli; rather, they shut down behaviors. These approaches also often punish the warning so escalation becomes “sudden” and more severe. Shock collars (sometimes describes as “vibration” collars) are sometimes thought of as quick-fixes but they create long-term tragedies by teaching avoidance and immobility, also known as learned helplessness.

If you need more help:

Seek out a consultation with a professional, certified behaviorist or a certified dog trainer.

Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers: <http://www.ccpdt.org>

Certified Applied Animal Behaviorists: <http://corecaab.org>