

## Over-Excited Greetings

First of all, we need to realize that what we consider to be undesirable, or abnormal, is both desirable and normal for a dog. To belabor the fact that our dogs descended from wolf packs, they still retain many instinctive behaviors that were beneficial to the pack's survival, in the wild. When a dog left the pack to scout, or hunt, it was exposing itself to dangers. When it returned safely, it was perfectly natural for it, and other pack members, to show demonstrations of pleasure, which, in dog language include jumping, licking, nipping, whirling, etc. For pack animals meeting animals of another pack, there are other instinctive procedures that have evolved. This includes sniffing (nose to nose and nose to butt). The reason that dogs jump up on you is that they greet other dogs nose to nose, and they are trying to do the same with you. This is simply to determine "do I know you?" If the answer is, "no, you are a stranger", then it becomes necessary to determine "are you friend, or foe?" This is done with testing actions. They start with playful overtures; actions, which are usually interpreted by us as "over-excitement". Understanding that these behaviors are perfectly natural, and for good reasons in the wild, should help us to control and channel these instincts.

In addressing this problem, we must realize that there are three related, but very different greeting situations that require similar, but different, responses. One thing common to all of the behaviors is that the dog is trying to get attention. Note that when used too often, the words "Don't", "No", etc. just become positive reinforcement, because, in fact, they are getting the attention that they desire. The three situations are:

- Over-excitement/excessive greetings when the child (or family member) returns to the dog's home after an absence.
- Over-excitement when others (friends or strangers) visit the dog's home.
- Over-excitement when meeting/greeting strangers away from home.

### Returning Home

Remember that the dog has missed you, and is concerned about you (you have been off scouting and hunting). So they think that this reunion demands celebration. Your reaction must be one that convinces them that it is not a situation that needs a celebration. This is simply done by being aloof! I.e., you are above all of this trivial nonsense, so you just ignore it. One source that I read suggests that you just act "regal". This can be done by paying no attention to the attention that you are getting. For a dog, this is best expressed by just folding your arms, and turning your back on the dog. After he settles down, you should slowly turn back to give him some attention, and praise. But, if he gets excited again, turn your back again. He will eventually realize that to get the attention he wants, that he must remain calm. This can be combined with some other diversionary command that he knows well, like "down", or "sit". However, it should be issued in a calm voice, without too much concern if the dog doesn't obey, at first.

If your dog jumps up on you, stare straight ahead, not at the dog. Do not scold or push the dog away. Using your hands is positive for the dog – he got attention! Just fold your arms over your chest and turn away and say "sit". When you have determined that the dog is sitting, immediately stoop down so you

are face to face (that is what he was after, in the first place), and pet and praise the dog. If he gets up, stand up, ignore him and repeat the above.

Since many of us only come home once per day, the above exercises can take a while. If your home permits it, you can give multiple lessons, by simply going out the back door (or other door), and coming back in again, several times per homecoming. Of course, in our case, this has to be exercised with the dog's child, as often as with the adults.

### **Home Visitors**

Home is a very special place for a dog, as it is for us. When someone comes to our house, we first want to ascertain if we already know them, which we do visually. Dogs do it by odor. So their butt sniffing seems objectionable to us, we should not discourage it, as that would be like blindfolding us. If the individual is not known to us, we want to determine if they are a risk. We would do that both visually and verbally. Dogs do it by engaging the stranger. i.e., if I jump up on this individual, does he respond in a friendly manner, or become aggressive? Finally, dogs respond excitedly to inform other members of the family (pack) that a stranger is present. So, their excited reaction is normal, and our job is to satisfy these needs the dog has in other ways.

The "ignore" response works just as well for visitors. So, if you have friends who are willing to assist in the training, just brief them on the proper "turn your back" routine. However, that is not practical for everyone. Therefore, we need to give the dog an alternative response. Sometimes, just issuing a command that they are proficient at like "down" or "sit" will keep them occupied, until they can observe from your behavior that this individual is OK. However I prefer a command that is more specific to the situation, at hand. I learned a technique from the "Sit Means Sit" trainers that worked pretty well with Duffy. I placed a small rug, or mat, near the door, and taught him to lie on it with the command "Place". This was taught by just combining the command "down" and "stay" which he already knew with the new command "place". So "place" has an implied "stay". You need to get this command firmly established before trying it with a visitor. Then when the doorbell rings, just give the "place" command and let the individual come in. If he breaks, firmly put him back. Briefly ignore him while welcoming the visitor, so that he can observe that you are calm, and OK with this visitor. Then call him to you, and keep him with you until he has settled before allowing any contact with the visitor. Giving him a favorite toy when calling him to you is also helpful.

### **Friends and strangers away from home.**

Adequate socialization de-sensitizes them, as they gradually just accept the presence of strangers as part of the background. However, strangers that approach excitedly are another story. Dogs instantly recognized that they have been recognized and react accordingly. They must first determine if this interested person is friend, or foe. I feel that what we observe as desire to play is partially an intentional test of the individual. I.e., if I interact physically by jumping up or licking or mouthing, I will quickly learn if this individual is friendly, or not. So, again, these excited responses are normal, and our job is to substitute something more desirable.

There are many ways to distract your dog. If the dog appears to be instigating the action, then a sharp "Leave it" usually works. However, if the other individual is the instigator, this seldom works. Depending upon the situation, the ignore technique works here, as well. This is fairly easy with someone you know, but not so convenient with strangers. If a stranger approaches my dog with the intention of physically interacting, I will usually say "please don't! He is working". If they ask to pet him, I may decline, with the same comment, if I am busy. However, if I want to allow the petting, I usually say "Only if he doesn't get too excited". That does two things. First, it gives the individual a clue that they should try not to excite him. Secondly, it gives you the opportunity to say "that's enough", if the dog does get excited.

If the dog shows excitement in spite of the above precautions, you must have a way to distract him. Of course, a favorite toy would do the trick. However, it is often not practical to carry around a tennis ball, or rope toy. If your dog is proficient with them, the "sit" or "down" commands will control the dog, but will not necessarily decrease his excitement, and will be perceived by him as a form of punishment. what you really want to do is to turn the dog's attention back to you. I use the "watch me" command which is designed to do just that. I perfect this command by using it at every feeding, where he has to watch me before getting the "OK" to eat. I usually combine it with a "sit" or "down". I will give an occasional treat here, but usually just finish up with praise.