



Although we all love a bit of enthusiasm in a greeting, dogs that jump all over people uninvited can become a bit of a nuisance.

It might be fine on a sunny afternoon when you get home from a tough day at work and may seem super cute in a tiny puppy. Still, it loses its appeal when the dog is a hefty 40kg adult, or when the dog has muddy paws, and you are dressed to go out.

Dogs that routinely jump up on their family or visitors can also potentially cause injury. Sharp claws can scratch or tear grandma's fragile skin or accidentally scratch the face of a toddler. If the dog catches the person off-balance, it could potentially lead to a fall.

Dogs that are over-enthusiastic with their greetings can also frighten people who are not used to dogs or who have had a bad experience in the past; this is especially true of larger breeds of dog.

So why do dogs to jump up on people?

Jumping up to greet people is thought to have its origins from an innate behaviour displayed by very young puppies to solicit food from their mother. The puppies jump up to lick the corners of their mother's mouth, which triggers a regurgitation response, delivering semi-digested food that the puppies can then eat. Quite simply, this behaviour is 'hard-wired' in all dog breeds and then reinforced very early with food.

Licking at the faces of other dogs often continues into later life as a form of appeasement greeting, especially when young puppies are meeting older dogs. Because human faces are well off the ground, there is a theory that jumping up at a human is the dog's way of trying to get closer to our face to perform this greeting.

Unfortunately, we humans often encourage and reinforce this behaviour unintentionally. When puppies are small and cute, or when dogs are new to a household, we often let them jump up on us and reach down and give them a pat or cuddle (or pick them up) when they do this.

From the dog's point of view, they get lots of attention and interaction when they jump up (the greeting behaviour of jumping up is reinforced repeatedly with pats, games and attention) so they learn that this is a behaviour that 'works'.

But I am not reinforcing the dog for jumping up – I tell him off!

A lot of old-school training techniques suggested that giving the dog a verbal 'correction', or physically pushing the dog down was the way to stop this behaviour.

It is not uncommon to see people try to push the jumping dog down with their hands, lifting their knee, or yelling and making a lot of noise to try to stop this behaviour.

The problem with these options is the dog may actually see it as a type of game – I jump up, and you push me down – lots of fun! They still have your 100% attention, and you are still interacting with them, so they are getting reinforced for a behaviour that you really don't want.

There is also the risk of the dog getting hurt or injured if it gets tipped off balance as it is pushed away.

Coaching polite greetings

Just like young children, we need to teach our dogs what we DO want them to do. Simply telling them 'No' doesn't do anything to teach them the correct response.

You cannot just expect that your puppy or dog will comprehend that YOU might like the occasional jump up, super enthusiastic greeting, but that they can't do it with other family members, elderly people, people in the street, young children or when they have muddy feet.

You need to think about what your **preferred greeting behaviour** actually is and then work to reinforce the dog heavily for doing that.

For most people, their preferred greeting is for the dog to sit in front of them, but you may choose 'four feet on the floor' as an acceptable position if you have a dog that finds sitting difficult (such as some of the larger sighthounds).

Then we need to make it very clear to the dog, over repeated learning events, that he will be reinforced with treats, toys, pats and interactions when he is in the 'greeting position', and he will get none of this if he is not.

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At the very start of coaching polite greeting behaviours, you should try to set you and your dog up for success.

Pick a time when the dog is not super excited (so not when you or the kids first come home), and things are relatively calm and arm yourself with some of your dog's favourite treats and a toy.

Ideally, start with your dog on a leash and ask another family member to stand still and hold onto the leash as you do some training. The person holding the leash is not to do anything – no jerking or pulling on the leash and they do not need to say anything. They are simply there to stop the dog from following you.

The plan is for you to approach the dog and greet it – 'Hello Bella/Spot'. If the dog goes to jump up, you simply turn and walk away – no yelling, no eye contact, no pushing or pulling – just walk away.

The fact that you walk away provides a 'consequence' for the dog – if you jump up, I will move away, and you don't get the chance to interact.

Repeat this 'approach and greet' until the dog sits (or just stands there and does not jump up at you), and then immediately reward the dog with a treat, pat or cuddle. Repeat a few times, then end the session with a short game or something else the dog values.

Like all new behaviours that you would like your pet to master, you will need to practise regularly. Try to take time out each day to coach the behaviours you want, and try hard to reinforce the ones you don't.

The more consistent you are, and the more times the dog is reinforced for the correct behaviour, the sooner the dog will offer the four on the floor response or a sit.

Training Tip !

To help you fit the training sessions into everyday life, stash some treats at the places you are likely to greet your dog, such as the front or back door or the side gate. That way, if they offer the desired behaviour outside of a planned training session, you can still reinforce them.

Once your dog masters 'Level 1 of Human Greeting Behaviour', you can then start to practise this same routine with a variety of people, all of whom do the same thing. Ask friends and family to help you. y

You will also have to practise the greeting behaviour in different locations - on your walks, outside the shops, at the park, and anywhere else your dog may greet people.

If everyone that the dog greets does the same thing, your dog will soon start to learn that there are never any pats or attention unless all four feet are on the ground.

If your dog does greet someone politely without being 'set up' to do so, make sure that you reward the dog yourself. Just make sure you remember to carry some treats the dog really likes when out on your walks – pack them with your leash and poo bags, so you don't forget to take them!

If you realise someone about to greet the dog when you are out and about, you can then either hand the person one of your treats and ask them to give it to the dog when he does the right thing, or reward the dog yourself.



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Progress takes time

Having a dog that is super reliable when greeting people will take time and patience. There will be scenarios that your dog masters very quickly, and others that may be a bit harder because the dog will be super excited and less able to control their emotions.

To start with, your dog may not be able to contain their excitement when you first come home. Sometimes they need to settle a little before they can muster the emotional control to be able to achieve a polite greeting.

If this is the case, you can simply delay greeting your dog for the first 10 minutes or so after you come home. When your pet seems to settle a little, then go out and work on your greeting behaviour.

If doorways are a place that you seem to have trouble – as you go out into the backyard or as you come through the gate - practise the same routine here.

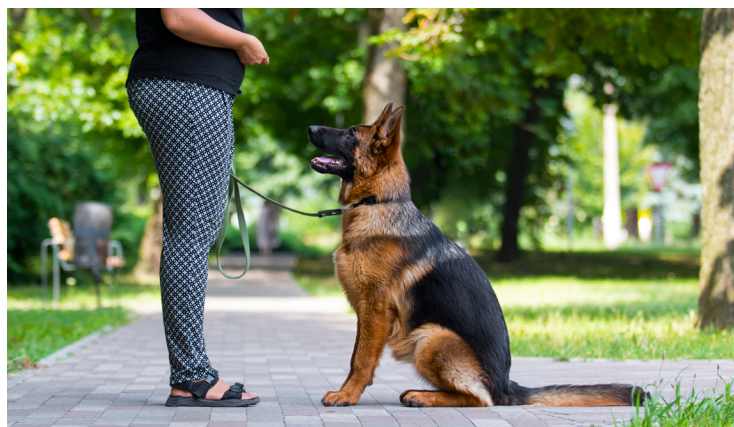
Open the gate or door, if the dog goes to jump up, gently shut the door and take a few steps away. Then open it again, close it, open it, close it, until the dog offers 'four on the floor' or a sit. Then you can quickly reward the dog with a treat, and then go outside and give your pet all the cuddles and pats you want.

For dogs who like to play, another option is to keep a few toys or a ball near the gate or back door, and immediately throw one as you come through into the yard. The dog will learn to expect the toy and will focus on chasing after it rather than 'mugging' you.

But what if I WANT my dog to jump up and greet me?

This is fine – we all love an excited greeting some of the time!

The key is to help your dog get it right by having an, 'it's OK to jump up now' cue. That way, you can enjoy this type of interaction, without the dog thinking it is appropriate all of the time.



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