



Rowdy, Jumpy, Mouthy Behaviors – How to Set Your Dog Up for Success

Dogs between 5 months and 2 years of age are still learning how to interact with the world. Like human teenagers, they are exploring their boundaries and skills. Additionally, many shelter dogs of any age experience high levels of stress that can contribute to rowdy/jumpy/mouthy behaviors during their transition home. It is important to give them the support and structure they need to encourage them to make desirable choices. Some common challenges include:

- ❖ Dog putting their mouth on you in play
- ❖ Dog jumping up on you or others
- ❖ Dog destroying household items
- ❖ High energy in early morning or late at night
- ❖ Dog grabbing at or biting the leash
- ❖ Dog ransacking house for food items

Below are some tips and tricks to help manage these behaviors:

- **Offer your dog daily physical and mental stimulation.** Having 1-2 hours of exercise per day is important for a dog's mental and physical health—and especially can dogs manage their excitement levels. **Note: don't go overboard!** Constant or highly rigorous exercise can increase stress hormones and arousal levels. Be sure to also increase mental enrichment, even if it is as simple as feeding your dog's meals using food puzzles.
- **Offer appropriate outlets for chewing and mouthing behaviors.** Give your dog different textures of chew toys, edible chews, or DIY enrichment items. Supervise the first few times, to ensure they consume it safely.
- **Recognize the times when your dog is most active.** Dogs are crepuscular, meaning they are typically most active around dawn and dusk. Plan to offer them additional outlets during those times.
- **Try a flirt pole (aka woof stick)** to help burn energy if you don't have time for an extended outing like a jog or hike, or space for other forms of off leash play. These can be purchased or made DIY style with a PVC pipe and paracord. **HOWEVER**, if this activity *increases* mouthing, discontinue in favor of a less exciting alternative.
- **Stop interacting with the dog when they put their mouth on you inappropriately.** For example, the moment the dog places his/her mouth on you, remove yourself by quietly standing up and moving away. Don't reengage until they offer a more desirable behavior (such as 4 feet on the floor or sitting). This teaches the dog that interactions end when they exhibit high arousal behaviors, and start when they are offering an alternative.
- **Step behind protected contact if ignoring is not effective.** If they escalate or continue when ignored, step behind a barrier such as an exercise pen or baby gate, out of the yard, or behind a door and wait for a more appropriate behavior.
- **As soon as they offer a DESIRABLE behavior (like 4 on the floor, or sit) offer an APPROPRIATE toy to your dog.** This teaches the dog what you WANT them to do, instead of allowing their frustration to build by simply being ignored. Ideal toys are at least as long as your arm, so they keep your hand away from where the dog grabs. This may mean stashing several toys around your living space to always have one ready to pick up.
- **Build relaxation skills and focus/engagement behaviors**, such as relaxation on a mat or mat work, touch targeting, and eye contact to give your dogs more tools in their toolbox and more opportunities to get things right.
- **Contact a certified professional dog trainer or enroll in a training class** to work on new skills/management strategies and introducing your dog to new types of mental stimulation. Training using positive reinforcement can make ALL THE DIFFERENCE to a rowdy pup. Training is also a form of mental stimulation, which is often just as tiring as physical exertion!
- **Use protected contact strategically.** Plan to exclude your dog from situations they might not be ready for. If you are having guests or small children over for example, plan ahead to partition your dog in a separate area with some tasty enrichment to work on if they don't yet have the skills to handle visitors.