



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 on you or others
Dog destroying household items High energy in early morning/late night
Dog grabbing or biting at the leash Dog ransacking the house for food items

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

- **Understand that all behaviors exist to meet a need.** Our first question should always be, *WTF?* That is, *“What’s The Function?”* Is your dog overexcited and looking to blow off steam? Are they SO happy to see you and are too overenthusiastic in their greeting? Are they uncomfortable with handling and asking you to stop?
- **Examine your dog’s outlets for daily physical and mental stimulation.** Having 1-2 hours of exercise per day is important for a dog’s mental and physical health. *NOTE! Physical exercise is good, but mental enrichment must also be present.* Studies have shown that exercise alone does not target a dog’s central nervous system and help them relax. For more information, check out our **Doggie Decompression** handout!
- **Make sure your dog has “legal” outlets for their mouthing and chewing behaviors!** Give your dog different textures of chew toys, edible chews, or DIY enrichment items. For ideas, check out our **Enrichment** handout!
- **Track the times when you are most likely to see jumping and mouthing behaviors.** Often there are patterns to these behaviors. Dogs are crepuscular, meaning they are typically most active around dawn and dusk, leading to spikes of excitement during those times. Certain activities can become triggers for the behaviors, such as when clipping on equipment, returning home, or during

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rowdy play. TRACK WHEN THESE SPIKES OCCUR so that you can be ready with a management strategy (see below).

- **Consider what you would like your dog to do INSTEAD.** We often think in terms of what we want the dog to STOP doing, but this doesn't give our dogs as much information as reinforcing (rewarding) what we DO want them to do. Being ready to tell the dog, "Yes, THAT's what I want!" is key to helping them meet their needs.
- **Explore changing the environment to prevent the behavior.** While working to change a behavior, it's important to try and limit the number of times a dog can *practice* the undesirable behavior. Once you know when the jumping and mouthing usually occurs, think about how you can CHANGE those scenarios so that it is less likely, or less likely to be reinforced (rewarded). Here are some examples:

Unwanted behavior	Management Strategy	Preferred Behavior
Dog jumps on you when you open the door	Put up a gate so the dog cannot reach the door as you enter	Dog stands with 4 feet on floor to get pets instead of jumping
Dog mouths when putting on walking equipment	Scatter treats to keep dog's attention focused on floor	Dog stands and eats treats instead of mouthing you
Dog grabs leash while on a walk	Bring an alternative long toy for dog to carry/ grab on walks	Dog walks with you while holding/tugging the toy
Dog counter-surfs for food when unsupervised	Clear tempting food from tables and offer enrichment instead	Dog relaxes/focuses on appropriate enrichment items

Training Behaviors to Replace the Jumping

- **Learn how to create a framework of communication with your dog.** Our dogs don't speak our language, so it is helpful for us to create a way for us to effectively communicate with them exactly what we want. That's where positive reinforcement training (often known colloquially as "Clicker Training") comes in. For an overview of how to begin creating that communication, check out our *Clicker Basics* handout, or watch our *Clicker Training 101 online webinar!*

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- **When you're ready to train, be ready to "catch them getting it right."** Even if it's the smallest moment of success! The lowest bar might just be to reward "4 feet on the floor."
 - [Here is a video](#) of a young mouthy Malinois puppy learning this behavior for the first time.
 - The trainer clicks and treats every time the puppy approaches and keeps their paws on the ground. This behavior might look simple, but starting at such a low bar (standing on the ground) is often the best way to build up a new habit when the old (undesirable) habit has been well practiced. Make it REALLY easy at first, then increase difficulty.
- **Preempt the jumping.** If you have an excited greeter, be ready to catch and reinforce more desirable behaviors PREEMPTIVELY! [Here is a video example](#) of how to begin working with a dog who habitually jumps and mouths in greeting.
- **Build a solid repertoire.** The more behaviors your dog knows to offer, the more chances they have to "get it right." Start by teaching foundation skills such as sit, eye contact, or nose targeting to increase the tools they have in their toolbox. Even fun tricks like spin or sit pretty can provide ALTERNATIVES to jumping that you can ask for in the moment. You can also explore more advanced skills such as relaxation on a mat or stationing. For examples on how to train these behaviors, [check out our other handouts](#), or reach out to our free behavior helpline!
- **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. Our [Canine Enrichment](#) handout has some great ideas!
- **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!