Picture: Houndstooth Studio, www.houndstoothstudio.com.au.

perth's *dog whisperer*

KATHY KOPELLIS McLEOD

The respected WA dog behaviour consultant helps us understand our canine companions

Help! My dog jumps up at visitors. What can I do to stop this chaos at the door?

WHEN the doorbell rings, does your dog run down the passage, barge past you as you open the door and jump on your visitors? This problem behaviour is one of the most common issues dog owners face and if it's not nipped in the bud it can create an ongoing struggle.

Although some people don't mind dogs jumping up, many detest it. Some people may be afraid of being knocked over or bitten, while others may simply not like this type of attention, which can sometimes ruin their clothes.

On top of this, allowing jumping can boost the chances that a dog with fearful or aggressive tendencies will bite.

Whether or not your dog actually bites is based on a few factors, including its reactivity level (for example, some dogs react to men or people who are loud) and your visitor's reaction (i.e. sudden movements can trigger your dog).

Given the issues that can arise from your dog jumping on guests, avoiding the situation is advisable. The following strategies will help make your home safer and more enjoyable for you and your guests:

* **Set new rules when visitors arrive.**
  To prevent your visitors enduring the antics of an out-of-control dog, use a lead when answering the door. This is preferable to grabbing your dog's collar, which can increase their arousal level making it potentially problematic if you have a fearful, aggressive or highly aroused dog.
  As you head for the door, stay calm – your dog will notice this and, with time, should pick up on your behaviour.
  If your dog's determined, you can help reduce the chance of them jumping up by standing in front of them as you open the door.
* **Sometimes it isn't appropriate to have your dog with you at the front door.**
  One option is to keep them outside and then, if suitable, bring them in to meet your guest. Another option is to have one family member answer the door while another is occupying the dog at the other end of the passage.
* **Train your visitors.**
  Your dog is used to playing by the rules of your household, so when a visitor comes it's critical you help them treat your pet as you do because consistency is vital. Politely ask your visitor not to greet your dog at the front entrance – most dogs are highly stimulated at this time and it can encourage jumping. Also ask them to ignore your dog until they've calmed down – this means avoiding eye contact and refraining from talking to or patting them. If your guest wants to, they can give them some attention once they've calmed down. This tip alone can hugely improve your dog's behaviour.
* **Give your dog a good reason to pay you more attention.**
  With your visitors' cooperation, encourage your dog to focus more on you when guests are present. Keep a stash of special treats and bring them out only when visitors arrive. When you catch your dog behaving well during the visit, reward them as a way of promoting the positive behaviour.
* **Use your family and friends as your "guinea pigs".**
  Ask family and friends to help you train your dog, even if that requires practice sessions where you act out what you'll do when a visitor arrives. This ensures that when the situation really occurs, your dog will be well rehearsed as to how to behave.

With prior preparation, clear guidelines for your dog and productive training sessions, greeting visitors calmly will be a breeze.

* ***www.kathysdogtraining.com.au***

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