

Dog: Attention-Seeking Behaviors



What Are Attention-Seeking Behaviors

All the annoying things dogs might do to get your attention:

Jump on you while you're quietly sitting
Constantly nudge, whine, or paw at you
Pull or nip at your clothing (or you)
Bark at you or drop things in front of you
Steal things to entice chasing

Dogs employ these and many other strategies to get us to interact with them and distract us from alternative responsibilities. Fortunately, attention-seeking behaviors are relatively easy to change.

Why Dogs Do These Things

Dogs are highly social creatures, and all dogs want some attention and interaction with their people every day. Some dogs—especially clever, energetic dogs—crave attention and will get it by any means possible. This is important to know because most of us react negatively to attention-seeking behavior (pushing the dog away, yelling) and that will likely reinforce the dog's behavior, or worse—break the human-animal bond.

What's more, we tend to automatically reach out and touch dogs that brush or press against us, and that also reinforces the dog for demanding our attention.

In other words, our go-to responses encourage the behavior we dislike.

Dealing with Attention-Seeking Behavior

First, schedule attention time. Schedule time to interact with your dog at least twice a day. During this time, focus all your attention on your dog and whatever you two are doing together. This could be practicing obedience or tricks, playing games like tug or fetch, throwing a ball or Frisbee, grooming, massage, or a cuddle session.

Second, reward good behavior. Outside of your scheduled together time, make a point of reinforcing your dog's good behavior. Notice when he is lying around quietly, playing with his own toys, or is in any way settled, and in return praise and pet him for it.

Third, discourage attention-seeking behavior. Whenever your dog does something annoying to get your attention, ignore him. If this causes him to back off, praise and pet him. If he doesn't back off, stand up, turn your back, or walk away. Whatever you do, don't push your dog away; he will interpret that as play. Instead, be a tree and refuse to interact with your dog until he's sitting or being quiet, then immediately give the attention he craves.

Tips

- Patience and consistency are key. It may take a little while to change your dog's bad habits, but if you stick with it, you can permanently cure your dog of his annoying strategies for getting your attention.
- If you don't see a change in your dog's behavior after using these strategies for a few weeks, contact a professional.