

## Dogs and Halloween



With October comes the changing leaves, the cooler weather, and the ghosts and goblins of Halloween. You may not be spooked by Halloween, but this can be an extremely stressful night for your dog which can make it pretty chaotic for you. While some of us are lucky to have a dog who happily anticipates the arrival of kids in costume looking for their treats, the majority of us dog guardians are not quite so lucky! With trick-or-treaters come little people who are excited... ringing doorbells, yelling, running, and looking quite different from what your dogs are used to!

If your dog is only moderately stressed out by this chaos, you still have time to teach him that the ringing of the doorbell can result in good treats for him too! Even if you have the world's friendliest dog, it's not usually a good idea to let them greet the trick-or-treaters. You never know which costume is likely to set him off, especially for those of us who were lucky enough to have rescued our dogs but without knowing too much about their past. Remember that your dog is counting on you to keep him safe.

Between now and Halloween, you can teach your dog that the ringing of the doorbell is a cue to run to his bed or crate for a treat. This is taught just like any other cue. You give your dog the auditory cue, guide them to their bed/crate and then reward them for going there. I would recommend starting with the bed/crate close to the door so that it doesn't take you 5 minutes to get your dog from the door, where he will naturally run to, to his bed. As you practice, you can begin pausing between ringing the doorbell and leading your dog to his bed. If he makes any movement on his own, with less of your assistance, jackpot-reward him! That is, throw him a party, give him lots of praise and keep the treats coming!

It's okay if you have to lead him for a while, it just means he doesn't quite get it yet, or maybe he gets himself too worked up from the sound of the doorbell. If this is the case, you may need to take a step back. Use the bell as an auditory cue that you are about to give your dog a treat. Use high value rewards and keep it simple. As

soon as the bell rings, you toss your dog a yummy treat. Practice this 5-10 times per session, take breaks, but practice multiple times a day. When you ring the bell and your dog looks at you, you've successfully counter-conditioned his response to the bell! Now you can continue with the above training techniques.

If your dog goes off the deep end at the sound of the bell, then it will probably be a much longer process to change his response and it would probably be in his best interest and yours to either give him something yummy to chew on Halloween while you hang out outside waiting for trick-or-treaters, or consider taking him for a car ride while another member of your household is in charge of the ghosts and goblins.

If you do continue with the doorbell training, don't expect that your dog will calmly hang out on his bed or in his open crate while you answer the door and hand out candy. The purpose of this is to help diffuse his anxiety and overall reaction to the doorbell when the time comes. If you think your dog can handle it, I would suggest giving him a stuffed Kong or tasty rawhide to chew while the Trick-or-Treaters come and go. The other option would be to crate him but toss in some yummy goodness on your way to answer the door each time. Again, if you think this would be too much, don't hesitate to get your dog out of the house for a few hours. As mentioned above, this could be with a car ride, a visit to a friend's house without trick-or-treaters, a kennel, or you could simply wait outside so people don't have to ring the bell.

As a final note, remember to keep your Halloween candy in a safe place. A lot of families leave them in kitchen drawers, on the table, or spread out on the floor while going through it. Please remember that while chocolate is delicious to you, it is extremely toxic to your dog!