

Holiday House Manners

The holidays are quickly approaching and this often means a lot of family get-togethers, cooler weather, crowded shopping malls, and 2 months worth of leftover food!

While this can be an exciting time for families, it can also be stressful if you are among the many others with a less than perfectly well-mannered dog at home. If Thanksgiving at your house brings you fears of grandma getting knocked down when walking in the door, excessive barking at the window, the turkey being stolen off the table, and downright chaos in the form of your four-legged companion, then it's time to start learning some good management techniques and it's never too late to start teaching your dog some house manners.

Let's break it down to the top 2 behavioral issues that most people deal with when it comes to having company over.

Jumping on guests:

Dogs naturally jump when excited. It feels good to them, it releases some energy, and they like to get to our faces. There's nothing innately wrong with this behavior, and often we send our dogs mixed messages about jumping.



If you walk in the door, and your dog gets excited to see you and jumps up on you, what do you do? Do you pet them and say hello right back? Are you glad that they are so happy to see you? It's in our nature to seek attention from our dog when we return home from work. Often, people enjoy that there is such a happy, wagging, bundle of fur waiting to greet you the second you walk in the door. So then, why is it not okay for them to greet all your guests in the same way? Because it's rude, it's chaotic, it can be dangerous, and most of all – it can be embarrassing for most people. It's important that you start teaching your dog very consistent rules about what is allowed and what isn't.

The next thing I'm going to recommend is going to be tough for the above group of people, the people who really want to greet their dog as soon as they walk in the house. You need to walk in and ignore your dog until he settles down. Dogs get very excited at the idea of someone walking through the door because most people have rewarded the behavior. Maybe you haven't rewarded it in such an obvious way as stated above, but pushing your dog away with your hands is also very rewarding. Talking to them is rewarding. Any attention from you is very rewarding and it's exactly why they are continuing the behavior.

Regarding guests coming over, the best thing you can do for your overly social dog is have your dog on leash. Break out the treats or a favorite toy. Having a second person to answer the door would be ideal. Make your dog sit before greeting and you or your guest can reward them by tossing treats on the floor. An

alternative would be to encourage your dog to take the toy in his mouth and hang on to it. Most dogs who have a toy in their mouth can't figure out the coordination to jump at the same time. The leash will be your friend here. If your dog jumps, you can remove him and either step on the leash or back him off and make him sit again. Remain consistent and you will see progress. The worst culprit for rewarding jumping can be that visiting dog-loving houseguest so don't let them convince you that jumping on them is okay "because they love dogs". This sends very mixed messages to your dog, so be his advocate and show him what is appropriate. Be proactive, rather than reactive.

Finally, don't feel like your dog has to be part of the greeting party. Keep an eye out for your guests so they don't have to knock or ring the doorbell (see my Halloween and Dogs article for information on getting your dog used to the doorbell). Give your dog a yummy bone to chew or a food dispensing toy (ie the *Bob-A-Lot* or *Tricky Paw*) while you bring the guests in and then when things are a little less chaotic, you can bring your dog out on leash to greet people. Again, follow the above sit for greeting rules to teach your dog that sitting gets him attention and jumping does not.

Of course, if you have a notorious jumper and frequent guests, consider contacting a qualified positive trainer to help you through this. Get a handle on the problem as soon as you can. It's never too late to work with this issue but the longer your dog practices the behavior, the longer it will take to break the habit.

Stealing food from the table or guests plates:

Think about this. Your dog eats kibble twice a day every day. Maybe once in a while he gets treats for good behavior. Then he smells the turkey, the stuffing, the gravy on the mashed potatoes... yum. That is far better than kibble! So he either goes straight in for the kill and just takes it right off the table or he's a little more subtle and works his magic on someone in the hopes that they will kindly share their food. Kids are great targets!



I'm going to jump ahead to the best thing you can teach your dog when the food comes out. He needs to go to his place, his bed, his spot. Whatever you choose to call it is fine. When it's just you and your household family, you can teach him that every time dinner comes out, he needs to lie on his bed by bringing him there and putting him in a stay. If you are consistent with this, he should learn quickly that no matter how many times he tries to inch his way closer, you are going to send him right back there. Consistency is key here! If he could get away with something yesterday, why not try tomorrow? Of course, if your dog doesn't know stay, you'll have to start there. You can also teach your dog to go to his place on his own, but that's another lesson entirely.

When you have a house full of guests and you are trying to coordinate the big meal, being consistent gets a lot more complicated so I would recommend getting

your dog used to a tether (a 3 foot line attached to a heavy piece of furniture or a hook in the wall, with a comfy bed to lay on) or his crate with a really tasty bone, stuffed Kong, or treat-dispensing toy. *Use the crate or a separate room if your dog has ANY guarding issues or if there are children who will walk about to pet him while tethered! My fear here is that the 5 year old child will walk up to pet him while he has his bone and he can't walk away from him, so he will react in order to protect his feast.

Another thing worth mentioning is that it is VERY important that you give your dog frequent breaks from the crowd of people. Even if you have the worlds most social dog, he can very quickly get over-stimulated and either react negatively to someone or get the *zoomies* within the house. Downtime in a separate room, the crate, or a walk outside will help lower his arousal a bit. Of course, if he's going to bark if you put him elsewhere, stuffed Kongs are great for this too.

As a final note, if your dog is on the opposite spectrum of sociability and does not enjoy having guests visit, I would recommend that you either skip this turn of having the family at your house or get your dog used to hanging out in a crate or loose in your bedroom. Then seek the help of a qualified professional!

Recommended products mentioned:

StarMark Bob-A-Lot: Amazon.com

Omega Tricky Paw: Amazon.com

Premier's Manners Minder: Amazon.com

This device was not mentioned above but it's a remote treat dispensing toy. It can either dispense treats at automatic intervals or you can push the button from another room. It's more expensive than other mentioned toys but it can be used for many behaviors. It's one of my favorite tools!

Dog Tie Down: http://www.hssv.org/docs/behavior/dog_tie_down.pdf

For a quick video showing the joy of treat dispensing toys, visit my YouTube Channel: <http://www.youtube.com/missbehaviornh>

Please also see my website MissBehaviorTraining.com for upcoming Holiday House Manners classes!