

CONTROLLING PULLING, LUNGING, CHASING, & JUMPING UP

Why do dogs tend to pull, chase and forge ahead?

Dogs tend to pull ahead and lunge forward for a number of reasons. Dogs that are particularly exploratory, playful, or investigative pull the owners down the street as they investigate their environment or are attracted to appealing stimuli (e.g. children, other dogs). As you pull backwards in an attempt to restrain your dog, he/she resists further by pulling forward even harder, since most dogs tend to pull against pressure. Dogs that are aggressive to stimuli (e.g. children, other dogs), and those that have the urge to chase or heel (e.g. joggers, cyclists) are likely to pull ahead in an attempt to chase. In addition, dogs that are restricted or restrained by a leash may be more likely to exhibit defensive aggression. Those dogs that are fearful or otherwise reluctant to leave home may be pulling and forge ahead on their way back home.

How can pulling and forging ahead be controlled?

It is a shame when owners are unable to engage in the simple joy of walking their dog due to extreme leash pulling. The dog should be taught through obedience training, lures and rewards to respond to the 'heel' command. Training should begin in an environment where success can be ensured. Using a control mechanism (leash and collar, leash and head halter), and highly motivating rewards, the dog should first be taught to walk at the owner's side. During the first few training sessions distractions should be avoided so that the rewards and motivation keep the dog's interest and attention. If the dog begins to pull ahead, pulling backwards on the leash and a neck collar, leads to resistance from the dog, causing the dog to lunge forward more intensely. It is best to take 1-2 steps at a time and keep your dog in the correct position, rather than trying to accomplish a long walk. As the dog learns where to be in relation to the owner, gradually walk a few more steps. Set the dog up to succeed. This can often be accomplished using a food reward held at thigh level to keep the dog's nose in position.

The head halter is one of the best means of gaining immediate control. When the dog is wearing a head halter and pulls ahead, a pull on the leash will cause your dog's head to turn toward you. Then by pulling upwards and forward, the dog will pull backwards into a sit. Quickly release tension and reward. However, in order to teach the dog to walk by your side, it is generally most successful if the dog is first taught to follow. First, teach the dog to follow you out the door. Have the dog sit and stay and then open the front door. If the dog begins to run out pull up and forward so that the dog returns to the sit, and release. Walk slowly forward so that you are between the dog and the door, slowly lengthening the leash while the dog remains in place but leaving no more than an inch or two of slack. Provided the dog does not forge ahead, step through the door and then allow the dog to follow up to (but not past) you. Proceed onto the porch and down onto the yard with the dog following. Any time the dog begins to step or forge past, the leash can be pulled up and forward so that the dog backs up, and released immediately when the dog is in place. Although the dog could be made to sit each time it pulls forward, the goal is to have the dog back up just far enough that it remains at your side. The tension on the leash is then released and the dog is encouraged to walk forward. In short, pulling tends leads to tension, while walking at your side earns release (ie a slack leash). If the dog "puts on the brakes" and will not follow, a tendency is to pull ahead, but, as mentioned, dogs tend to resist by pulling in the opposite direction. To get the dog up and following, loosen the slack on the lead and encourage the dog to follow verbally or with food prompts. Once you have the dog successfully heeling in the yard with no distractions, you can proceed to the front yard and the street while there are still no distractions. With practice, strong motivators and the use of the head halter, the dog can then gradually be walked in the presence of stimuli that might otherwise cause lunging and forging, such as other dogs, cyclists, or children playing.

Another solution is to use a "no pull harnesses". These devices fit around the dog's body and around the forelegs so that when the dog forges ahead the forelegs and body can be controlled. Although these harnesses do not provide the level of control afforded by the head halter, compared to head halters, they require little or no training and do provide immediate control of pulling.

My dog chases and I am worried he will get hurt. What can I do?

Chasing and running after prey, nipping at heels and herding are normal dog behaviors. These behaviors are more strongly motivated in some breeds of dogs than others. In addition, some dogs may be motivated to chase intruders (people, other dogs) from their property and, when the intruders leave, the behavior may appear to the dog to have been successful. This usually results in the dog continuing in the "chase" behaviors. In order to control chase behaviors, it is necessary to train the dog to do something different than it was doing before. It is not enough to yell "no" and punish the dog. This alone will not stop a behavior that has a strong motivation, but may cause the dog to be more anxious or fearful about the "stimulus" which would INCREASE the problem.

First, let's talk about prevention of chasing behaviors. Once you have witnessed the young dog engaging in an inappropriate chase, now is the time to start training. Get a leash on the dog and teach it to sit and stay. Then present the dog with the distraction that it would normally chase and reward the dog for good behavior. Remember, when off the leash the dog may revert to its old habits. Therefore, try to avoid those situations until you feel confident that the dog will behave. Once the dog has been engaging in chase behaviors for some time, it will be more difficult to stop the behavior. The very fact that the object the dog chases runs, is reinforcement enough. A program of desensitization and counter-conditioning is needed to correct the problem. This consists of teaching the dog to sit and stay for rewards while gradually introducing objects that the dog chases. It will be necessary to first start with objects the dog is unlikely to chase and progress to more tempting items. If the problem is severe, a consultation with a behaviorist may be necessary. Control with a head halter and leash often is the most practical and most successful at ensuring that the dog will sit and stay in the presence of the stimulus. The use of highly motivating rewards (favored food treats, favored toys) can also be used to lure the dog into a sit and given as a reward for staying.

My dog charges the door and jumps on people who enter my home. What can I do?

Another behavior that causes problems for owners is door charging. Door charging is the behavior of the dog speeding to the door whenever anyone knocks or rings the bell. To deal with this problem start by teaching the dog to sit and stay for a food reward in the entry area. Gradually phase out food treats when the behavior is learned and can be reliably repeated. Next you may need to practice with family members entering the home. Finally, when the dog has mastered the task with people he knows, practice with visitors, keeping the dog on a leash and making it sit and stay. Again, a leash and head halter is an excellent way to control the dog and train it not to chase or jump up when people come to the door. Always require your dog to sit before it gets petted and you can go a long way to eliminating jumping behavior. If the dog has never even practiced the task without distractions, how can you expect the dog to perform the task when visitors come over? If door charging behavior is coupled with aggression, you should seek the help of a behaviorist.

How can I prevent my dog from jumping up on others and me?

For many dogs, jumping up on people is part of their greeting routine. Often, owners have tried to discourage this behavior using methods such as squeezing the front feet, stepping on the dog's toes, or kneeling the dog in the chest. Yet the behavior continues. If that is the case with your dog, then it is important to think about what might be motivating the dog to jump up and what is the reinforcement for the behavior continuing.

Usually the motivation for the jumping up behavior is to greet people. Many dogs like to greet "face to face", like they do with their canine counterparts. People, however, find this objectionable. Correction therefore must not be directed at punishing the problem, but rather finding a means of teaching the dog an appropriate greeting posture. This usually is a sit/stay, which can then be rewarded with food and attention. Once the dog has perfected this without people there and practiced it with family members, the dog is

ready to try with visitors. Make the dog sit and stay while people come and hand the dog a treat. If the dog gets up, then put him back in the sit and try again. Often placing a "treat jar" by the front door with a bell on it will help. Once the dog associates the bell on the jar with a treat, and a treat with a sit/stay, the dog will be more likely to perform the task.

Another way to train this behavior is to set up visitors to come to your home. Have the first person come to the door and instruct your dog to sit and stay. Then, let them in. Hopefully with some effort you will get your dog to continue to sit. Have the person enter, give a treat and sit down. After 5 minutes, have them leave out the back door, come to the front and enter again. This second entry should go easier as your dog will have just seen the person. If you can repeat this 4-6 times for each visitor, the dog will have plenty of opportunity to learn the new task.

Once you understand the motivation, and have trained a new task, you need to be sure you have identified all the reinforcement for the behavior. If the dog succeeds in getting any attention for the jumping behavior, then the dog will continue to jump. Attention may be petting, pushing away (which resembles play behavior), and even mild reprimands can be reinforcing for a dog who really wants attention. To change this behavior you need to remove ALL reinforcement. This may mean that you do not look, speak, touch or interact with the dog IN ANY WAY when it jumps on you. Walk by the dog, give a command such as sit, but do not interact with the dog. Alternately, you could try punishment to see if you can disrupt the behavior just as it begins.

To use punishment for jumping up, you need to be able to QUICKLY AND HUMANELY interrupt the behavior. This is often best done with some type of device that makes a loud noise. Shake cans, rape alarms, and air horns, all make loud noises that will often startle the dog. As soon as the dog hesitates, you need to give the dog an alternative command so that the dog can do the proper thing and then reward the dog with praise. So, as you administer the noise, you say "SIT" and when the dog sits you reward it with praise and food treats if available. Many dogs soon learn that to avoid the noise, they need to sit and will do so to greet you. Then have the person leave, and reenter the home, using the device and command if the dog does not immediately sit, and a good sit and reward as soon as the dog does sit. Continue to have the person leave and reenter until the dog sits for its reward without hesitating.

Another method that is consistently successful at deterring and preventing the jumping up, is to leave a leash and head halter on the dog during greeting. All it takes is stepping on the leash or a quick sharp pull to prevent or disrupt the jumping up. Again, be certain to reward non-jumping behavior.

Some people like to allow the dog to jump up on them at certain times. You must never allow the dog to choose the time. Ideally you should teach your dog to jump up on command such as "give me a hug" or "come up here". This way, you have the behavior under verbal control and you decide when the dog will be allowed to jump up.