

Impulse Control

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What is impulse control and why should I teach it to my dog?

Impulse control is the equivalent of your dog asking “Please?” when they encounter something they want. The purpose of teaching this canine response is so that your dog doesn’t default to rude, impulsive behaviors such as jumping, rushing forward, barking or mouthing.

Impulse control is vital for a well-behaved canine! Moreover, a well-mannered dog is a happier dog. If your dog’s default behavior is to have a meltdown in the presence of exciting things – can you imagine how anxious and unhappy they would constantly be?

How to work with your dog on impulse control.

Dogs thrive on structure and rules. Your dog needs to learn that *you* are the conduit to all good things and that *sitting quietly* is how he earns everything he wants and needs. Here a few tips to use when teaching your dog this important lesson:

- **Do not reward aroused behavior.**

Your dog must learn that *nothing* happens when he is in a frenzy. Do not acknowledge your dog or allow him access to what has sent him into the frenzy. If you come home from work and rush to let him out while he’s in his frenzied mental state, from his point of view: the more aroused he is, the faster you rush to let him out. *Your dog will repeat what works, so arousal will become a habit whenever you or someone else enters your home.* In other words, being strung out will become a habit for your dog. To avoid this, enter quietly when you come home, change your clothes, check the mail and when your dog is calm and quiet, let him outside.

- **Offer high value treats or praise for calm behaviors.**

Just as unwanted, impulsive behaviors must not be rewarded, calm behaviors must be reinforced. The best way to help your dog understand what is expected of him is to offer yummy treats when he exhibits calm behaviors. Or, if your dog isn’t treat-motivated, offer them all the love, belly rubs and praise you can muster! Dogs learn best through positive reinforcement.

- **Patience.**

Teaching your dog impulse control will take time and patience...from both of you. Commit to giving them the time and practice it takes to learn the correlation between calm behaviors and rewards.

- **Dogs are a mirror – they reflect the energy we give them.**

Be aware of the energy you, the leader, exude because it drives your dog’s behavior. If you are frantic or frustrated and speak in choppy, high pitched or sharp tones, if you touch your dog in quick pats and frantic scratches, he will respond with behaviors that match that energy.

- **Give your dog ample opportunity for release.**

Adequate exercise is essential! In addition to daily walks, dogs need about 20 minutes of aerobic exercise to get their heart rate up. So whether it’s Frisbee, playing fetch, jogging, hiking or doggie play dates, be sure to give your dog the healthy outlet for any stress or built up energy they may have.

If you have a pet behavior question or would like some training assistance,
San Diego Humane Society is here to help!
Visit our website at www.sdhumane.org to view our behavior and training options,
or call our **Behavior Helpline at 619-299-7012 ext. 2244** to speak with a trainer.