

Many times, the key to getting your dog to do what you want - or to stop doing what you don't want - comes down to using the right technique. You must teach your dog what you DO want them to do rather than only telling them what you don't want them to do. Scolding and punishing your dog for their natural behavior can break down trust between you and your dog as well as cause your dog to do these behaviors when you aren't around or aren't looking instead of not doing them all together. In addition, it has been proven that these aversive techniques can increase anxiety and frustration and even lead to aggression.

Many of your dog's nuisance behaviors are behaviors that are natural to him such as chewing, jumping, and housesoiling. Dogs don't inherently know that people don't enjoy these things so they must be taught. There is a basic principle underlying all behavior modification techniques, which is that if your dog's behavior gets them what they want, they will continue doing it and if their behavior does not get them what they want they will cease doing it. Dogs only repeat behaviors that are rewarding to them.

Why Scolding and Yelling Don't Work

Most people don't realize that negative attention (i.e. yelling at your dog to get off of you, repeating their name several times to get them to stop doing something, chasing them when they grab something they are not supposed to have, saying "No!", etc.) can actually be perceived as a positive thing by your dog. Being scolded is unpleasant for a person, but for a dog it's another way of engaging with a human and, for most dogs, they will simply take what they can get.

Encouraging Behaviors You DO Want

Give positive attention for the things that you want your dog to do. This includes giving your dog food, treats, praise, affection, or playtime anytime your dog does anything you like and want them to continue doing, (i.e. relaxing on their own bed, chewing on the appropriate toy, doing something cute, when your dog does something that you ask them to including sit, down, wait, etc.) give him positive attention. Don't take these behaviors for granted and remember to reward your dog with positive attention to let them that you like these behaviors and want to see them repeated. You should also do the same thing when your dog stops doing any unwanted behaviors (leaves the cat alone, stops chewing on inappropriate items, removes feet from the table top, etc.).

Discouraging Unwanted Behaviors

Redirect your dog when they are doing something you don't want them to do (chewing the wrong thing, feet on a table top, walking towards something that might get them into trouble). Call your dog away in a friendly manner and give them something equal in trade. For example, if they are chewing on something they shouldn't, give them an appropriate chew, or if they are up on a table top looking for food, do some training with food treats or provide your dog with a food filled enrichment toy such as a Kong Classic toy.

Manage your dog's ability to get to things that might get them in trouble. If your dog gets into trouble by tearing up things or having accidents in the house when you are not home, then you should keep your dog confined either in a crate or in a dog-proofed room when you are not home. Likewise, if your dog is inappropriate with guests by either jumping on them or behaving in any other inappropriate manner you can either put your dog in their dog proof area, in a kennel, or keep them on a leash so that they don't practice behaviors that might get them the attention that they want.

Ignore any behaviors that you want to go away (i.e., jumping on you without invitation, demanding attention by barking, pawing, licking, etc.). Being consistent is the key to getting this to work. If you sometimes ignore the behavior and then sometimes you welcome this behavior it will not be clear to the dog when it is acceptable and when it is not. Also, be prepared for your dog's behavior to get worse before it gets better, this is called an "extinction burst". If the dog isn't getting results with a behavior that worked before, they will step up their efforts and it may become increasingly difficult to ignore them - but you must so that you remain consistent.

At times you may have to make it clear to the dog that you are deliberately ignoring them. You can do this by giving them the "cold shoulder", turn your head or body away from the dog, folding your arms, or actually walking away. For dogs that are more needy or demanding of your attention, you should be sure to initiate interactions with your dog first rather than only responding to your dog when they are begging for attention, or they are being pushy. This way you get to decide when interactions begin and when they end, which will teach your dog that you will make time for them but only when the timing is appropriate.