



Understanding Over Aroused Dogs

Dogs who are jumpy/mouthy, lack impulse control, and/or are highly active and constantly stressed are often referred to as “high-arousal” dogs, which is the working label we are going to refer to them as in this handbook. “High-arousal”, however, is merely a catch-all term that encompasses many different types of dogs. Many factors can be in play as to why your dog is high-arousal, and it’s crucial for us to figure out why your dog is acting this way as understanding where the behavior(s) are coming from will dictate how we work with them.

This handbook is designed to be easy to access, meaning you don’t need to be an animal or behavior professional to understand the information or perform the training protocols in it. There will be some technical terms and jargon but we will do our best to explain what those terms mean when first introduced.

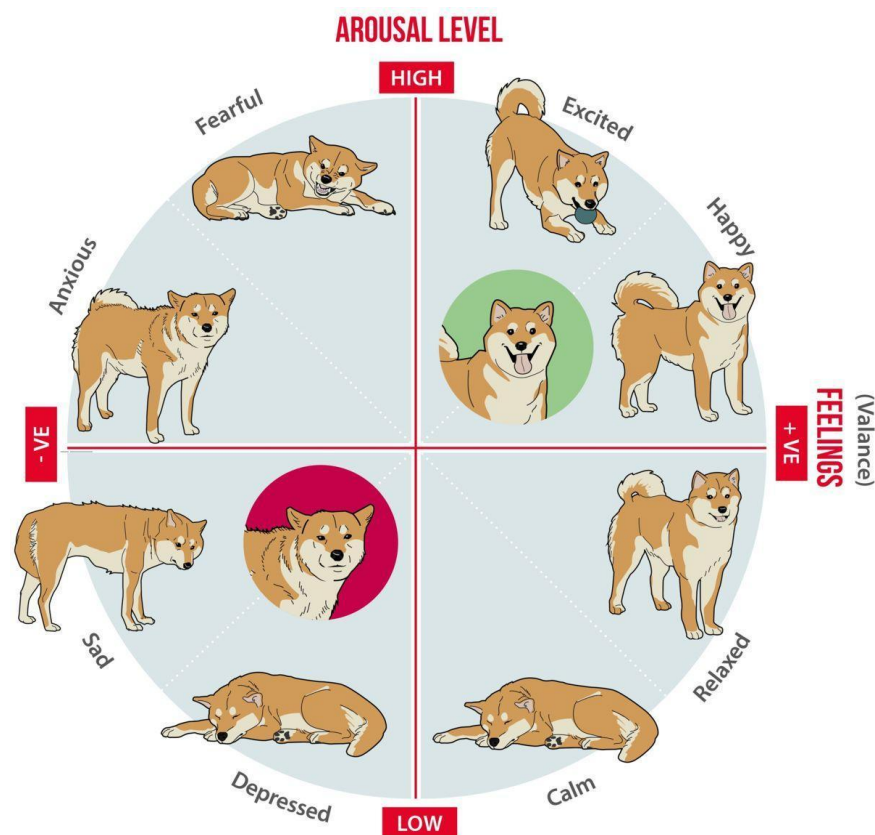
Regardless of your experience as a dog parent, if this is your first dog, your 100th dog, if you’ve worked with high-arousal dogs before or not, remember that behavior is fluid and it can and will change from day to day. One day you may think you’re headed for a breakthrough and the next it seems like your dog’s behavior is worse than ever before. That’s ok. Just like with people, our mood and tolerance changes day to day. At various points in your training you may feel frustrated or defeated or that you have failed your dog, and that’s completely normal. Take a break and come back to it later. Just know that your dog is trying their best and their hardest, just like you are, and nothing that they are or are not doing comes from spite, being mad at you, being stubborn, or trying to be dominant.

If you need further assistance with your dog, please contact us at behavior@alexandrianimals.org and we will be happy to help!

Notes

- Each category will have an explanation of common traits, as well the best protocols to use for that type of dog. Feel free to use any or all of the protocols to tailor a plan that works best for your dog.
- It’s entirely possible and common for dogs to fall into multiple different categories. If this is the case with your dog, we will need to take elements from each category to best help them.
- It’s also very common to think you know which category your dog falls into, but as you work with them it turns out that they begin to show traits from another category. No worries! This happens all the time, even with professionals setting up and guiding high-arousal dogs through a training plan
- Working with a private trainer is always recommended, especially since there are so many nuances that could cause over-arousal, possibility of your dog falling into multiple categories, various treatment options, etc. If your dog is or begins showing aggression at any time, hiring a private trainer is a must. Any trainer you work with should be certified (CPDT, and IAABC are the most common but there are others as well) and only use positive reinforcement techniques. Please feel free to reach out to our behavior department for a list of recommended trainers.

Different Types of High-Arousal Dogs



Attention Seeking

Likely the most assumed reason for a high-arousal dog's behavior, especially for dogs who jump and mouth. Dogs who fall into this category are often very social, may lack impulse control, and need help learning what's an "acceptable" way to interact with people, at least by our standards. The type of behaviors they show are typically what we call "distance decreasing", meaning the dog wants you to come closer and engage with them. Jumping and mouthing are commonly coupled with soft eye contact, loosely wagging tails at or below spine level, and a soft and relaxed body. You may also experience excited barking and whining or even excited urination. A dog will also revert to any type of behavior that has gotten them attention in the past such as barking, jumping, mouthing, etc., despite our intended reaction to it.

Protocols to work on:

- Rewarding Calm
- Touch & Go
- Relax on a Mat
- Enrichment

Excess Energy

Another oft-assumed reason for a high-arousal dog's behavior is that they have excess energy. This certainly can be the case, but many times it's not. Luckily, this is easy to test out. Offer your dog more enrichment throughout the day, feed them out of puzzle toys, increase the amount of physical exercise they get each day, and work on teaching them new tricks to help keep their brain busy by learning new things. If after offering and increasing these things on a daily basis you see your dog's behavior improve, then this is likely the category they fall into. If this is your dog, you will need to continue to provide increased mental and physical exercise every day, regardless of weather conditions, work schedule, your energy level that day, etc.

Dogs who need an extra energy outlet will typically show signs of frustration and/or attention seeking behaviors as well.

Protocols to work on:

- Touch & Go
- Therapeutic Fetch
- Enrichment
- Basic Manners

Frustration

Frustration is a root behavior we deal with a lot when working with dogs, and it's becoming more and more common as we better understand what dogs need and require on a daily basis. Dogs dealing with frustration will often lunge at people and/or other dogs (stimuli) on leash, but are very social and friendly when off leash. This is because they see stimuli, get really excited about it, but then become frustrated when held back by a barrier such as a leash, fence, window, door, etc. Frustration may also manifest as a result of a dog trying to seek attention but being ignored, so they begin to bark, jump, mouth, or perform any other behavior that has garnered them attention in the past. A lack of physical and mental exercise is also likely to be factor in frustrated dogs as their boredom can cause them to seek out other things and behaviors to do to help keep themselves occupied, and the things dogs decide to do on their own are often things we consider to be less than productive such as jumping, mouthing, barking, or chewing.

Protocols to work on:

- Rewarding Calm
- Relax on a Mat
- Leash Walking (for leash reactivity)
- Enrichment

Distance Increasing

"Distance increasing" behaviors are behaviors that a dog will perform to tell a person or another animal "hey, I need space" or "please stop". Normally, a dog will try more subtle signals to convey their desire for more space such as turning their head away, sticking their tongue out an inch or two, or yawning but these signals can go unheard. When the subtler cues don't work, a dog will then up the ante by doing something less likely to be ignored such as barking, jumping, or mouthing. Pay attention to your dog's body language as a whole. In addition to the behavior listed above, a dog who is showing high-arousal behavior due to distance increasing will also have a tense body (muscles on body and face seemed flexed, have defined lines between muscle groups), and either are or are trying to move away from you between interactions.

Be sure to pay attention to your dog's body language and what they are trying to tell you. It's ok for a dog to not want to interact at that particular moment, just like it's ok for us to not want to go out, or engage with someone.

Protocols to work on:

- Touch & Go
- Relax on a Mat
- Enrichment

Medical

A commonly overlooked category, one reason for your dog's high-arousal behavior(s) could be due to a medical issue. It is recommended to get your dog checked out at the vet to do a physical and full blood work to make sure there's nothing going on that could be causing your dog to not feel well.

Defining and Identifying Arousal

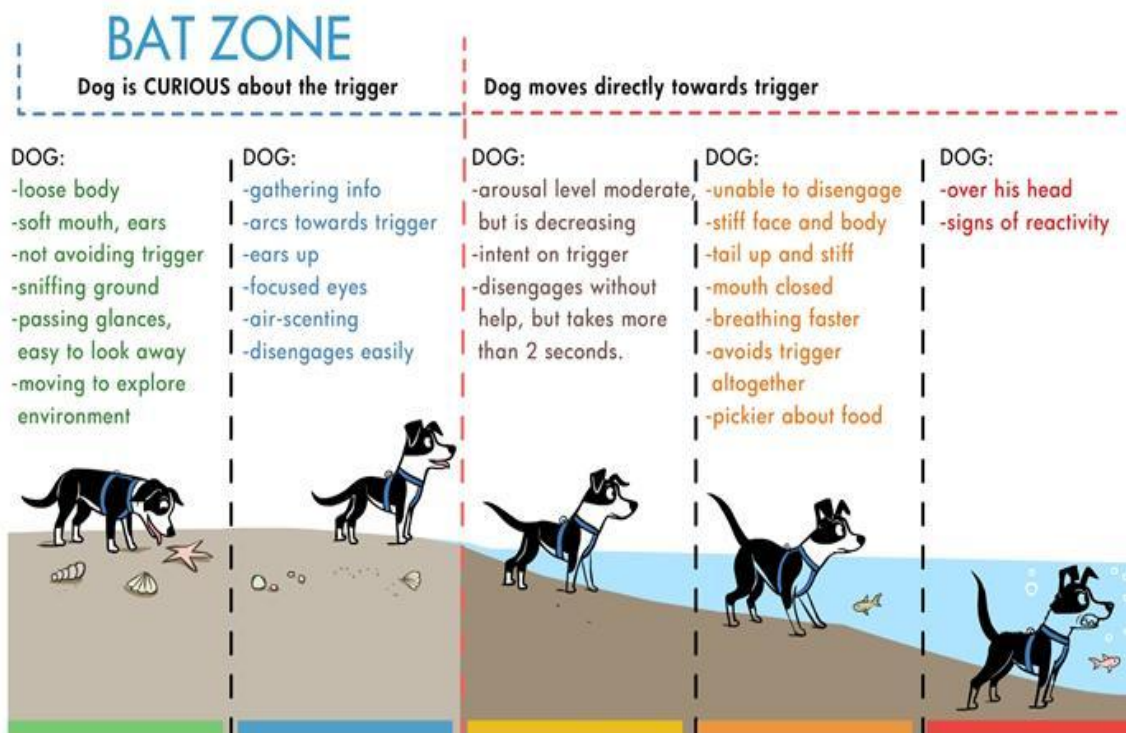
In simplest terms arousal is a heightened emotional state of being. When in this elevated emotion state, dogs are faced with having to make decisions about how to react to a certain situation or stimulus, just as they have to do all the time, only now they are in an increased state of fight or flight, and sensitivities to stimuli and environmental change are increased. Think about how you may respond to a certain situation when you are calm and relaxed vs when you are overwhelmed and feeling on-edge. Your reaction to the same situation is likely to be different depending on your current emotional state and well-being. Overstimulated is another term used for over aroused. Impulse control can be loosely defined as your dog's ability to make a decision, and then recover, while over aroused. For example, a dog who sits when in a state of overarousal is often referred to as having "good" impulse control while a dog who jumps when over aroused "lacks" impulse control.

Signs of overarousal in your dog can be easy to miss or to write off as "excitement", but it's very important to be able to recognize when your dog is in a state of heightened arousal so that you can react appropriately. If your dog is jumping or mouthing at you or your clothes, mounting you or other objects, unable to focus, or hyperactive, it may be that they just haven't been taught appropriate social behavior (in which case you would want to address that behavior with training)—**but it could also be because they are in a state of overarousal**, in which case training will **not** be effective, and you will need to make efforts to calm your dog down (that means **not** yelling at or even talking to your dog as much as possible and using a quiet voice and slow, calm movements if you do) or simply lead them to an area where they can be alone for a while and decompress. Avoid petting or touching your dog, unless you are using slow, calming strokes all the way down their body. **Your dog is not able to make good choices when they are over aroused, and action should be taken immediately to *reduce* arousal!** See the charts below to help you identify signs of oversrousal in your dog. You want to keep your dog in the green and blue zones as much as possible. If/when your dog gets into the orange or red zones learning can no longer happen, and we need to get them back to yellow or lower as quickly as possible.

STRESS & SUPPORT SCALE

Stay On The Beach!

Dog's stress level is analogous to rising water level



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HYPERAROUSAL



HYPERACTIVE



DESTRUCTIVE



PANTING



FACIAL GRIMACE



UNABLE TO FOCUS



SNATCHING TREATS



MOUNTING



LIPSTICK SHOWING



**CONSTANTLY JUMPING
AND MOUTHING**



EXCESSIVE FRIENDLINESS

Management

Not all dogs are born with a sense of impulse control. In fact, it is a skill that they develop in adolescence. Though oftentimes even when they have developed a sense of impulse control, some dogs just have a very poor sense of it, and need some help from us to learn better skills!

Dogs who lack impulse control tend to see what they want and go for it without thinking about any of the potential consequences. They are often reactive (barking, lunging) to new stimuli or stimuli/situations they feel uncomfortable about. They tend to get very excited very quickly, and when they are excited, they have a hard time calming down. They may exhibit jumpy/mouthy behavior at this time as well, which is one of the most problematic behaviors for dogs who lack impulse control. It is very important to note that jumping and mouthing are often due to **overstimulation** or **over arousal**—this means they are in an emotional state and they aren't thinking clearly. So, no matter how well they may know and respond to cues normally, **they will be unable to while they are excited**. The key to reducing this behavior is to teach impulse control and reward calm, relaxed behavior, **not** to react to this behavior in the moment when it happens.

When a dog is jumping up or biting/mouthing for attention, it is very important to not react in any way. Even looking at the dog will reinforce their behavior (remember dogs communicate with body language!). The best thing to do is generally to stand up if you're not already and turn away from the dog with your entire body, holding your hands either tight down by your side or tucked into your chest so as not to entice mouthing. If the goal for the jumping and mouthing is attention and reinforcement, and if they don't get any, it will eventually stop. If your dog's goal is to have an interaction end then once you ignore them they will stop. Yelling at and/or pushing the dog away or holding the dog down when they're jumping or mouthing will only **reinforce** the behavior as well, because **this is also attention, and your dog now thinks that you are now engaging with them!** Continue turning away and looking away (or even calmly **walking** away into another room) until the dog stops jumping or mouthing. This is the important part: the **second** all four of your dog's feet hit the floor and their mouth comes away from your skin, **immediately** praise and reward your dog. This way you reinforce **not** jumping/mouthing, but are instead **replacing** the jumping/mouthing with clam behavior.

It is crucial you don't react to the jumping and mouthing by **running** away (which is unfortunately how kids often unknowingly react!), as this will trigger the dog's genetic drive to chase and now they're playing an even more fun game, and you've reinforced their behavior with something far better than treats and attention! It is also important that you don't grab the dog or pick the dog up and **physically** move them away into a "time out," because by touching the dog to do so, you've already reinforced their behavior by giving them attention, so the intended "time out" is now not related to their behavior at all. The best way to manage a jumpy/mouthy dog around children or guests is to **keep a long thin leash or rope attached to their collar at all times** so that you can easily pick up the leash and move them **away** from the kids or guests if they begin jumping or mouthing without having to touch or even look at the dog. Or you can always put the dog away in their safe haven (see separate Safe Haven protocol) if it isn't going to be long. Preventing the behavior from being practiced and repeated is of utmost importance, as this only reinforces it in the future!

Often, the dogs who show these behaviors are also chronically **under-stimulated**, meaning they need more exercise and enrichment, or in other words: they're bored. Did you notice that "Enrichment" was included in the recommended protocols for every arousal category above? That's how important enrichment is to a dog, especially a stressed one. Consider adding another walk to your dog's daily routine, and adding more enrichment activities (discussed later in this handout) to your dog's day to day. At the same time, also consider how much sleep your dog gets. **Dogs need about 12-14 hours of sleep a day, and they should be napping periodically throughout the day. Dogs who don't get enough sleep tend to become over aroused**

easily (much like humans!). Make sure your dog has the time and space available to rest and nap throughout their day. It's also easy to **over** exercise your dog by trying so hard to make sure their physical exercise needs are met that you create a very well-conditioned, endurance dog that can no longer be physically tired!

Rewarding Calm Behavior

The best way to teach your dog what's appropriate and what's not is to **reward the stuff you like while ignoring everything else**.

Teaching the Behavior

1. Stand or sit in a quiet location with your dog on leash and simply wait for your dog to show **any** calm behavior such as, but not limited to:
 - a. Standing with all paws on the floor
 - b. *Not* barking (at least three seconds of silence)
 - c. Sitting or lying down
 - d. Eye contact
2. Click and reward with a treat **each** time these behaviors occur, regardless of **why** they are occurring. (Example: Your dog was barking but only stopped because they got distracted by a noise outside the yard.)
3. Ignore your dog if they bark at you, jump or mouth, or do any other unwanted behavior in an attempt to get your attention.
4. Repeat steps 1-3 until unwanted behaviors *decrease* and other appropriate and calm behaviors *increase* to replace them.

Notes:

- Be sure to reward any of these behaviors any time you see them throughout the day as well! If your dog is sitting or lying down quietly watching you while you work, read a book, watch TV, etc., be sure to toss them a few treats for doing such a good job! Don't take what seems to be a "lack of behavior" (or doing nothing) for granted; think of all the *other* things that your dog could be doing instead and **reward their decision to make a good choice**.
- You may need to keep a high rate of reinforcement as you begin training. Rate of reinforcement is how often you deliver a reward to your dog. It's common when first working on rewarding behavior to have a rate of reinforcement of 1 second, meaning you will be giving your dog one treat per second to keep them from jumping. As your dog progresses with the training you'll be able to lower or decrease that rate of reinforcement.

Troubleshooting

- Think your dog *never* shows any calm behaviors? Try moving to a different area with less distractions at first and **gradually** increasing distractions. Also at some point your dog will **have** to sleep or eat or drink—so even if you have to start there, it's a start!
- Does your dog seem to be getting frustrated or bored/unable to focus? Try going for a walk or run or playing a short physical game first—or training before meals! Also try a higher value treat or **reinforcing more often** to keep them motivated.

Touch aka Hand Targeting

The touch is a very simple and often very useful cue for a variety of reasons. For dogs with poor impulse control or bite inhibition, it can be helpful to teach them to touch our hands with their noses **instead of** their teeth.

Teaching the Behavior

1. Hold your hand up in front of your dog's nose, only about an inch or two away from them at first.
 - a. If they don't immediately touch your hand, as most dogs usually do, just wait a few seconds, or try moving your hand around (just ideally don't move it closer to the dog), and they often eventually will touch your hand. If they get up or move away, just wait for them to settle, reset, and try again, this time starting closer to their nose. If they still don't show any interest in your hand after many attempts, and you're placing your hand as close as you can to your dog's nose without touching them, try touching something your dog really likes the smell of so that they are likely to sniff your hand!
2. Once they touch your hand with their nose, click and reward, giving a treat from your opposite hand. Repeat, **gradually** moving your hand further and further away and alternating hands.
 - a. Once the dog is reliably touching your hand with their nose (or for purposes of this protocol, you can also reward licking if you want, as this is a better alternative to biting!).
3. Once they are reliably touching your hand when it's presented, add the verbal cue "touch" **just before** they touch your hand.

Touch & Go

This protocol will help teach your dog not to jump on you for attention, and not to jump as they approach you by giving them an **alternative** behavior to perform instead.

Notes

- Prerequisite: Make sure your dog has a really good touch cue before beginning this protocol. It would also be a good idea to run through some touch cues on their own to get your dog warmed up and make sure they are ready to work.
- No need to use the verbal cue for "touch" in this protocol; you can use just the hand signal.
- After your dog knows both the plans below, be sure to stay fluid as you're working with them. It's ok and expected that you'll need to weave through the protocols a bit!

Teaching the Behavior

1. With distance between you and your dog, call them to you and when they come within a few feet of you, drop some treats on the ground
2. After they finish eating either allow them to walk away on their own or toss another treat a few feet or more off to the side to encourage them to move away from you.
3. Repeat steps 1 and 2 five times.
4. Now, call your dog and hold your hand out either in front of you or by your side.
5. When they approach and target your hand, click and reward.
6. After they finish eating the treat, take another and toss it a few feet away from you so the dog has to move away to get it.
7. Once they've found the treat you tossed, call them again and repeat the process, gradually increasing the distance you throw the second treat as they get better at the game.

A second part to this protocol incorporates you moving around and your dog following you. Your movement creates excitement which ups the difficulty level for your dog. You can use this separately as a “part B” of this protocol and/or you can use it when your dog inevitably either runs ahead of you or falls behind you during the plan.

1. Begin walking through a room in your home or a yard at a slow walking pace, with your dog following either close behind or next to you.
2. As you are walking, hold your open hand out by your side, giving the “touch” hand cue.
3. When your dog approaches and touches your hand, click, give them a reward, then continue walking.
4. Repeat the process as your dog continues to follow you and remains with their paws on the ground while targeting your hand.
5. As your dog gets really good about following alongside you and is performing an almost constant touch, then you can start tossing treats off to the side for them to have to walk away to eat, then come back to you to target your hand and repeat the process.

As your dog continues to do well, increase the speed in which you are walking, going from a slow walk → normal pace → fast walk → light jog → running, etc. The faster you move, the more exciting and difficult it is for your dog!

Troubleshooting

- Is your dog jumping to target your hand? You may be holding your hand too high. Try lowering it so it's no higher than eye level to your dog.
- Is your dog not following or focused on you? Make sure you're using treats that are high-value and enough to keep your dog's focus. Or, if you are out in a yard and there's too much going on in terms of sights, sounds or smells, other dogs or people, then try moving to a different area.
- Feel free to hold the leash as you do this activity so you have better control if your dog is more difficult to handle due to making contact as they jump, mouthing or any other reason. You may want to clip them to a longer line so they have more room to move about if you're outside
- Are they not coming when called, or too excited when they get to you and unable to focus on your hand target? Try tossing the treat closer to you so it's not as far for them to go, and they won't lose too much focus. The shorter distance also means your dog will not build up as much speed or excitement on their approach to you.

Calm Greetings

Teach your pup to approach people calmly by default with this simple method. Put your dog on leash and then have someone hold the leash—they must make sure to hold the leash still as if it is tethered in place.

1. Approach your dog until you are just at the edge of their reach.
2. Stand still and **calmly wait until they're sitting**, then enter their space reward with attention and petting.
 - a. If they jump up, move out of their space immediately and without reaction, and simply wait silently until they are sitting again.
3. Repeat for a total of 5x then end the session.
4. Practice this many times and have as many people as possible do this exercise!
5. Next, when you can approach and pet your dog without them attempting to jump up, start playing with them and getting them excited by waving your arms around excitedly, talking in a high-pitched voice.
6. Back away and move out of their space if they start jumping or nipping and wait for them to sit calmly again before entering their space.

7. Begin jumping around and playing with your dog (you can even use a toy), again talking in a high-pitched voice. Back away and move out of their space if they start jumping or nipping.
8. Repeat.

Notes

- You could also use a baby gate instead of having someone hold your dog if you don't have anyone else to help. It is just a bit more complicated because it adds the step of having to open the baby gate, which will likely excite them again, causing them to jump! If this is the case, you could try keeping your hand on the gate and wait for your pup to calm down and sit, and then swing it open to pet them quickly before they have a chance to try to jump.
- This method is most effective if done **frequently**—just five minutes or less here and there every day goes a **long** way with this! Also the more different people practice this with your dog the stronger and more generalized the behavior will be, and the more likely your dog will be to be calm even when excited or when greeting strangers.

Another way to practice is to have a stranger approach while you hold your dog on the leash. Mark (click or “yes!”) and reward when your dog is not jumping (any time they have all four feet on the ground!). The key here is to be proactive and begin as soon as your dog notices the person approaching—don't wait until the person is already close or for your dog to start jumping. If your dog jumps up, have the person stop approaching (or walk away if they're already petting your dog), or walk your dog backwards away from the person. Remember not to ever jerk your dog or use “leash corrections”—just hold the leash firmly with your hand by your side and step back with your feet. Wait for your dog to calm down and have the person continue approaching/petting your dog.

- ★ You may have to practice just the approach several times before the stranger is even able to get into your dog's space without being jumped at.
- ★ If your pup struggles with this, you can try holding treats at their nose and slowly feed them while people pet them to keep them distracted.

Therapeutic Play: Fetch

Nothing better than a good ole ball game! And just like with any game there are a few ground rules we need to abide by. The goal of this game is to teach the dog to stay engaged with you and thinking even when excited (teach impulse control), and to break up high energy games with pauses to help them learn to reduce their arousal levels better.

Notes

- Prerequisite: Sit or down
- Use a toy (or whatever item!) your dog will enthusiastically retrieve (ex: balls, plush squeaky toys, etc.)
- Do not put your hand on the toy until your dog has dropped it.

Teaching the Behavior

1. Show your dog that you have the toy, get the dog excited about it by hitting it around on the ground or waving it around in the air (try different silly things and making different silly noises and see what your dog responds best to!), and then when your dog is excited, throw it.



2. When your dog returns with the toy, pick it up.
 - a. Even if they don't come directly back to you—go to where they dropped the toy and pick it up at first. You can work on getting them to bring it closer each time later. Hold the toy up and cue your dog to “sit” (or “down”).
 - b. Really, you can use any behavior here—whatever your dog knows—but using ones that encourage calming (such as “sit,” “down,” “stay,” rather than say “speak” or “jump” or “spin”) is a good idea, as it helps your dog learn to switch between higher and lower arousal better. The goal is simply to help your dog get into a pattern of **thinking and offering you behavior** rather than simply staying in a high arousal state constantly.
 - c. **A good cue to incorporate in this exercise is simple eye contact (“look” or “watch me”), as it teaches your dog to look away from the thing they're excited about and look at you instead. You can also just hold the toy up and wait for your dog to offer you eye contact and reward that eye contact with throwing their toy.**
3. Click and then throw the toy after your dog offers the desired behavior. Chasing the toy again, and the continuation of the game, is their reward. This also helps the dog understand the concept of life rewards—in which they will be given opportunities to engage in behaviors **they** like (chasing toys) as a reward for behaviors **you** like (sitting, being calm and patient).
4. Repeat.

Troubleshooting

- Is your dog not dropping the toy upon returning? Look to the Drop It training plan below.
- Is your dog not chasing the toy or not showing much interest in it? Try a different toy. Some dogs will really like chasing tennis balls, other stuffed toys, etc—there may be that **one** special toy you haven't found yet that is *perfect* for chasing!
 - Some people also have success with cutting a small slit in a tennis ball and placing a treat inside it.
- Still not showing any interest? Then maybe fetch just isn't a game they like to play. No need to force it!
- Chasing the toy and playing with it but not bringing it back? Get excited and start calling them back to you—in fact, **turn and run away**—this will *almost always* entice dogs to chase you!
- You can also try to entice them to come back with a **second** toy.

Drop It

Teaching the Behavior

1. When your dog is holding a toy in their mouth, hold a treat directly in front of their nose. If the dog doesn't drop the toy for the treat, try a higher value treat. If that doesn't work, just wait until the dog has a different (lower value) toy and try again. If **all** toys are too high value to drop for **any** treats (think fresh meat or cheese!) then you can start with an item the dog isn't super excited about, but one that they will still pick up.
2. When the dog releases the toy, pick up the toy at the same time you deliver the treat into the dog's mouth. If you feed the treat before picking up the ball, the dog might pick the ball up again before you can get to it!
 - a. If the dog is super sneaky and will grab the toy and treat at the same time, or won't take the treats if they can see the toy, you can alternatively toss a few treats onto the ground **away** from the toy (beside the dog instead of in front) so that they have to turn their head to get the treats, giving you an opportunity to pick the toy up unnoticed.
 - b. Some dogs may be more motivated to drop toys for a **second toy** as a lure instead of treats.
3. Throw the toy again and repeat.
4. Once the dog starts quickly and reliably releasing the toy when the lure treat/toy is presented, **only then** you can add the cue. Start saying “drop it” **just before** presenting the lure treat/toy.

5. After many repetitions, you shouldn't have to present the treat anymore. The dog should start dropping the toy when they hear "drop it." Now start producing the treat as a reward (**after** the behavior) **instead** of as a lure (**before** the behavior).

Relax on a Mat

Providing a specific place and rewarding them for laying down in that place will help give your dog a place to go to so they can calm down and decompress. You'll also be using capturing and shaping techniques, so it will help provide extra mental stimulation and allow for problem-solving skills.

Teaching the Behavior

1. Choose a calm, quiet, ideally small, area to practice (can use baby gates or x pens to make a small room if necessary). Set the room up before bringing your dog in with the "mat" on the floor (this can be a blanket, towel, bed, mat, etc—the goal is that it is something portable that you can move to different areas!), and make sure any toys or other interesting items are picked up. Once your dog is in the room, sit down on a chair or couch, ideally not the floor, next to the mat and allow the dog to explore, giving them a few minutes to walk and sniff. It actually helps to be doing something, like reading a book or using your computer or phone, for this exercise.
2. Once they have acclimated to the room and are no longer distracted (typically one to three minutes depending on the dog), gently drop a few treats onto the mat you've laid out for them. Click once they touch the mat to begin eating the treats and repeat once or twice more.
 - a. You don't want to toss treats excitedly or make any noise when you give treats in this exercise. Just try to drop them or lie them gently on the mat so they don't move. Remember the goal is calmness!
3. Click and throw treats onto the mat any time your dog approaches the mat. After a few repetitions, they should begin to realize that good things happen when they are on the mat.
4. As you repeat this and start seeing your dog going towards the mat intentionally, start waiting to toss a treat until your dog puts a paw on the mat... then two paws, then three, then all four.
 - a. This is often a good place to stop the session if you haven't already. Sometimes it may take several sessions to get this far and that's okay! Go at your dog's pace and don't spend more than about 10-15 minutes on this exercise at a time at first.
5. Once they are fully standing on the mat, wait for them to sit before clicking and rewarding. This step alone could take several sessions!
6. After your dog is consistently sitting on the mat, wait for them to lay down before rewarding.
7. Now that your dog will go to the mat and lie down, start looking for any signs of *relaxing* (not just sitting in a relaxed position) and marking and rewarding them. This might be something like sniffing the ground calmly for a few seconds, exhaling a deep breath, resting their chin on the ground, rolling over onto their side/back, etc.
8. Eventually, the mat itself will be a cue for your dog to relax for an extended time when they need to calm down. You can add a cue like "go to your mat" or "place" (again **just before** they go to it) when they start going to it consistently.
9. Now you can start taking the mat to different areas to practice, **gradually** increasing the distractions!

Helpful Tips and Tricks

- If you keep the mat out all the time, any time you see your dog approaching or sitting or lying down on it, even when you're not doing a training session, you should reward them in the same way as you did during the protocol.



- If your dog gets really excited about training and the clicker, it may be best not to use the clicker for this exercise and simply use a marker word or just toss the treats without a marker, since timing isn't super important for this exercise and the goal is to shape calmness!
- Do not interact with your dog while working on the protocol. The goal is for them to learn to regulate themselves and provide them with an alternate behavior when they are feeling anxious or overwhelmed. This is why it's good to be doing something, so you aren't distracting your dog! If physical touch is what you have to use as reinforcement for this exercise, be sure it is always slow, calm, gentle strokes and not fast patting, which will excite them!
- Be sure all the treats land on the **mat**, as you want your dog to learn that the mat is where all the good stuff is happening! This is why you should probably sit right next to the mat, unless you have perfect aim! Also, when you start rewarding your dog for sitting and lying down on the mat, it will be important that they don't have to *get up* to go get their treat, meaning it should land right in front of them.
- Your dog may perform an array of behaviors throughout the training in an attempt to try and understand what warrants the reward. Reward only the behaviors you want, and ignore all others.
- If your dog does not begin to settle or relax, remaining highly stressed and aroused, after approximately 10 minutes, then stop and take a break. You may want to provide them with something to chew on for a little bit, or go for a walk or run, to act as a stress reliever before trying again.
- It's best to do this protocol in 10 to 15 minute intervals.

Leave It

"Leave it" is an incredibly useful and potentially life saving cue for a dog to know. It is also a simple exercise that helps dogs understand the idea of delayed gratification—or impulse control! By practicing this simple exercise whenever possible, your dog learns that lunging forward toward things without thinking gets them nothing, but patiently waiting gets all the rewards!

The easiest way to introduce the concept of "leave it" is to use a low value treat or toy (that your dog is still interested in) that you can fully close inside your hand.

1. Hold the treat out and show your dog you have it (but don't let them have it), then close your hand around it.
2. Be patient and wait. Your dog will likely sniff and mouth at your hand for a while to try to get the treat. The **moment** your dog turns or looks away from the treat or backs up away from it, mark (click or "Yes!") and reward with a higher value treat from the **other** hand (**your dog will never get the original treat**).
3. Repeat several times, until your dog reliably backs up or looks away almost as soon as you show them the treat. When you are sure that your dog will reliably look away when you show them the treat, you can now add the cue "leave it" just before they look away. Remember **never to repeat** the cue! Give them time to think and react on their own.
4. Repeat this process several times. Eventually, the dog will probably not even look at the treat when you present it to them. Now it's time to repeat the same process, but with the treat on a chair or counter within the dog's reach (not the floor yet!), hovering your hand right over it to cover the treat up if the dog goes towards it. Slowly and gradually move your hand further away as you practice.
 - a. Remember you **must always be able to prevent your dog from getting the treat if they go for it after you say "leave it!"** The more they can get a treat after you've said "leave it," the more irrelevant they learn the cue is, so be sure not to trust them too quickly with this

exercise!

5. After several repetitions, the dog will probably begin not even looking at the treat again. That's your cue to up the difficulty again! Now try putting the treat on the floor right in front of your dog, again using your hand to cover it up at first. It helps here to have your dog lie down, or at least sit, if they know it.
6. Repeat, again gradually and slowly moving your hand further away, but not before **you're sure** they will leave it! You can also start putting the treat closer and closer to your dog as you practice.
7. Once your dog has mastered "leave it" with treats on the floor, you can begin using different toys, then higher value treats like bones, and even shoes/socks—whatever they may like to steal or carry around! Just remember to increase difficulty **slowly** by increasing the value of the objects (to the dog!) **a little at a time** and not allowing them the opportunity to take the object (be able to cover it either with your hand or foot, or have your dog on leash to prevent access).

Enrichment

There is an old saying, "A tired dog is a happy dog," but "tired" is an oversimplification. Dogs need to use their brains as much as we do. If they don't have opportunities to express their natural behaviors (digging, chewing, barking, chasing, etc) they can become anxious or hyperactive which can lead to any number of behavior issues. Be sure to incorporate plenty of enrichment (opportunities to express behaviors in a healthy way) into your dog's daily routine. Just letting your dog run around the yard or going for five mile hikes every day in an effort to keep them tired all the time will lead to creating a super athlete who will no longer be able to **get** tired! Focus on **mentally** tiring your dog out just as much as (or more than) you **physically** do. Rest and relaxation are a huge part of a dog's day, as well as sniffing, licking, chewing, and scavenging!



Enrichment is a great way to be creative—the possibilities are endless! They can include...

- Sniffing
 - Going for sniffy walks where the goal is to allow your dog to sniff and explore rather than focusing on distance. You can also go to a park or other dog friendly areas on a long leash (20 foot +) so they can decide where to go and what to sniff.
 - When on a sniffy walk allow your dog to take as much time as they want without hurrying them along
 - No training or cues should be given to your dog during these walks (except for emergencies). The goal is simply for your dog to sniff, explore, and relax.
 - This is immensely tiring for dogs both mentally and physically!
 - Buying or making a "snuffle mat" (think carpet with high pile so treats can get down in between the fabric) and let them sniff out food/treats
- Eating all meals out of puzzle toys (check out nina-ottosson.com or make DIY versions out of paper towel rolls or water bottles with holes in them so they can roll them around on the floor to get the food out), or tossing all meals into the yard for your dog to scavenge (this is how they get their food and how they spend most of their time naturally)
 - Dogs often prefer to work for their food and find more satisfaction in their food, and in life in general, when they work for it!
- Chewing/licking:

- Hard rubber or indestructible toys such as Kongs, Starmark, Bullymake, etc.
- Many of these are hollow and can be stuffed with food and frozen for extra enrichment
- Pig ears/bully sticks (check out [Himalayan Pet Supplies](http://HimalayanPetSupplies.com))
- Put some food/treats inside some boxes with wadded up paper for them to destroy
- Frozen treats made in your dog's food or water bowl with their favorite kibble/treats, peanut butter, cream cheese, yogurt, etc. filled with water and beef or chicken broth
 - Lickimat.com has lots of licking options—freeze these and give them to your dog to help them engage in a natural calming, soothing behavior (licking)
 - You can use a plate or frisbee as a cheap alternative



AIN'T MISBEHAVIN'!

The most common cause for nuisance behaviors in dogs is boredom.

Dogs are social creatures and crave attention and affirmation.



Ignoring a dog for long stretches at a time and then reprimanding him for seeking attention is counterproductive. Reprimands are a form of attention. Behaviors that earn the dog attention will increase in frequency. Reprimands only confuse the dog.

1. **KEEP YOUR DOG BUSY: GIVE HIM SOMETHING TO DO.**
2. **WHEN YOU TAKE BREAKS, (PLEASE) DON'T FORGET TO PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR DOG.**
3. **TEACH/REWARD YOUR DOG TO RELAX ON HIS BED.**
4. **GIVE YOUR DOG EXERCISE, PLAY AND MENTAL STIMULATION EVERY DAY.**



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