



Greater Androscoggin Humane Society

www.SavingPetsinMaine.org

Maria's Tips from Pet Talk 12/3/2020

Does your dog rush the door when someone arrives?

If you worry about your dog/cat getting out while visitors come and go, create a gating system for dogs. While it may seem “mean,” it can be the best way to manage the risk. Cats are often more manageable, but for those who are a flight risk, owners should consider having them in a separate, secure room when people are entering and exiting.

My rule of thumb is if you can't trust a dog to greet visitors without being pushy, running out of the open door, barking, etc. then they should not be allowed to go to the door. Other options for dogs may be kenneling, tethering, and for the future, teaching them to wait/sit and impulse control. Allowing inappropriate door greeting can create a lack of deference in a dog towards their humans and when a dog is barreling to the door when the doorbell rings, the dog will believe that they are the ones allowing the visitor into the home. It is important for the human to allow the visitor into the home. If your dog is being pushy, even if it's out of excitement and friendliness, this confuses the roles. Some dogs are extremely reactive to masks and if that is the case, putting them away behind a gate while social distancing is respected is the easiest way for the dog to remain calm.

Dogs learn by association, meaning when you grab their leash they know it's walk-time, or when you pick up a ball and they are ready to play. Humans use associations as well. When I was a child, you'd find me parkouring across the jungle gym in the park while frantically looking for the ice cream truck because I had heard its sweet music in the distance. With that understanding, consider pairing a stimulus (like a doorbell) with scattering treats on floor or giving them their dinner in a bowl, etc. This will teach your dog that a doorbell means FOOD instead of meaning it is time to rush to the door. In addition, this provides them a great distraction while bringing the energy level down so that you can reward the good, calm behavior. Keep in mind, the higher value the treats (meat, bits of cheese, etc.) usually trump rushing the door or other undesirable behaviors but lower value (biscuits etc.) they may dismiss. Dogs, like humans, are opportunistic. Over time, you should start to see the animal searching the floor, bowl, or their bed if you teach them to go to it for their reward if done right and consistently.

Does your dog steal food or counter-surf?

Why do dogs counter-surf or snatch food? Well, because they can. Somewhere along the line through unintentional reinforcement they found doing those things to be highly rewarding. The counter or the kitchen table is where the best things are - a loaf of bread,



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your dinner, a piece of mail to rip up. Nothing fun is on the floor! Some dogs will even surf because they are looking for your attention (good or bad) and know that doing so will get it.

Using that philosophy, think about switching it up and having items of more value on the floor or on a chair - someplace within reach and where they are allowed to be. You can even try hiding items under a rug/blanket/towel. Not only will this teach your dog that desirable things are within their reach, it will give them a job to do. Imagine how much fun it will be for them “hunt” the floor in search of their freeze dried chicken, dog food, or little tidbits of treats? Over time, your dogs would constantly be searching the floor instead of up high, because they’d have learned where the best or most interesting items are. It will be important to “dog proof” your counters and table while you are training, so they also get used to the idea that there’s nothing fun up there to get.

Do you have a food snatcher?

In my history of clientele, some of the most “aggressive” food snatchers have been in homes with children, and it makes sense. Maybe it’s the toddler feeding their Cheerios to the doe-eyed dog below or a child spilling their milk while the dog follows, licking up the spilled liquid gold. It teaches a dog that they can just have whatever comes their way- no questions asked and no “working” for it needed. That equates to a lack of deference towards their humans.

All living beings were meant to work for their keep, their food, to feel accomplished and to survive. Posted on the website is a visual handout called “Learn to Earn” which can help a dog learn that they must work for everything and that they are not entitled to anything. If your dog is a food snatcher and you have children in-home or perhaps the dog came from a home with children or humans who doted lavishly upon their animals, that may be the answer to this behavior.