

Homeward Bound Golden Retriever Rescue

Golden Rule Training

How to Stop Begging Behavior

Dogs usually beg for two main things: food and your attention. Your dog's begging behavior may involve him staring at you, sitting in front of you, pawing you, nudging you with his nose, and whimpering or barking to get what he wants. Some people give in, and when they do, it starts a new, unwanted behavior. The best prevention is to never give in!

Dog begging behavior can be extremely annoying and it certainly classifies as bad dog manners. A dog who begs from you will aimlessly beg from others. This could involve embarrassing situations if your dog attempts to beg from guests at your home.

Remember, dogs do what works. If you have ever given him table scrapes at the table, he will never forget and consistently try and make that happen again.

Doggie Zen Exercise

We start with a simple exercise to set the stage. Use a clicker, (or instead say an emphatic Yes!) to mark the behavior; I recommend the clicker because it is a great tool for behavior modification.

1. Take a yummy treat and hide it in your hand. Show your dog a closed hand and let him investigate. Most dogs will lick, sniff, nudge, or even paw to try to figure out how to get the yummy treat they can smell inside your closed fist.
2. Wait until the slightest pause, and then click, and with your other hand give him the treat. You're teaching him to be calm and patient.
3. Repeat this exercise a few times until your dog starts to understand "Oh, I need to back off in order to get the treat!"
4. Treats only come from your hand and when you decide to give one to him.

For some dogs, this will be the first time that they have ever needed to demonstrate self-control around food so, it may take some time for him to learn the concept.

Teach your dog to be calm around food

If you have not done so already, teach your dog to wait for his food before he starts eating. This is a good leadership exercise as well as a way to establish impulse control over food.

1. Ask your dog to "sit" while holding the food bowl with just a little bit of food in it. When he sits, start slowly lowering the bowl to the ground. If your dog continues to sit, continue to lower the bowl and if he is still sitting, lower it onto the ground and "release" him to eat. If your dog gets up as you lower the bowl, lift the bowl back up and ask for the "sit" and start again.
2. Pick the bowl up and put some more food in it, just a little. Repeat the exercise, but try to lower the bowl a little more this time. If your dog continues to sit, click and place the bowl on the ground and let him eat.
3. Repeat the exercise at dinnertime each day until you can get the bowl all the way to the ground while your dog remains sitting. Don't try to lower it too far too soon. *The most important learning is when your dog succeeds, not when he fails.*

When your dog gets really good at this exercise and the bowl is all the way on the ground, you can start increasing the amount of time the bowl spends on the ground before releasing him to eat. Don't wait so long that your dog fails. The point of this exercise is for your dog to succeed at sitting patiently to be released. You can gradually increase the waiting time.

Teaching your dog to settle at dinner time

Ask your dog to lie "down" then count to one silently in your head. You can either use a clicker or say "Yes" to mark the good behavior. When he is lying down, then click and treat. If necessary, ask your dog to "down" again. Immediately count to two in your head, then click and treat.

If necessary, ask your dog to "down" again. Immediately count to three in your head, then click and treat. You're building duration slowly, so he can successfully settle while you are eating dinner (this will take time and consistent practice).

If your dog gets up while you are counting, calmly tell him "down" and restart your base count at one.

When you can count to 30 without your dog getting up, then you can start doing this while you eat your dinner. By this stage, most dogs will have figured out that they need to be lying down when you're at the table and will not need any extra cues.

It won't take long to develop the duration of this behavior, and you can stop counting and just click and treat randomly.

Tips for Success

- Don't ever give your dog food while you're eating at the table; your entire family and guests must abide by the rule!
- Your dog should only be eating food from his bowl. This includes any dog treats you give him (excluding crate treats and training treats).
- Do not feed your dog table scraps; it is not healthy for your dog and it will reinforce a behavior you don't want!
- Avoid paying attention to or looking at your dog when you are eating. Paying attention to your dog will encourage the begging. You are setting him up to expect something.
- Tell every member of your family to stop giving your dog food from the table, food from the couch, food from the chair, etc.
- When you are eating, place your dog in a sit/stay or down/stay and have him remain there until your meal is finished (see instructions above).
- Never give a dog a treat while he is begging. Treats are always your idea (not his) and should only be given when a dog's attention is not on food.
- If your dog will not hold a down stay and you want him in the room with you, then put a good treat in his crate, such as a stuffed Kong (something special that he only gets when in his crate) while you are eating. Ignore any whining or barking, he will get used to the routine.

Dogs are natural scavengers and some like people food more than others. All dogs will go after any food they can reach from a counter when you're not looking! Make sure food is not left on the counter! Since food is a high value resource to most dogs, it may take time to change the behavior. The key is consistency and patience.

Sources:

2006 Aidan Bindoff, www.positivepetzine.com

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