



What works for your dog?

Does your dog have interesting or persistent attention-seeking behaviors? If so, you will really appreciate this exercise! It will help you to recognize and decrease your reaction to these behaviors, therefore decreasing their reinforcement value for your dog.

Dogs do what works for them! They learn that though they can lie on your sofa when you are not home, when you are home this does not work. It is that simple. We tend to interpret their actions as though the dog were another human who is “getting away with something.” The truth is dogs just do what works for them. And if it worked once, then they will try it again. If it works with one member of the family but not for others, they will adjust accordingly – and will likely test other family members from time to time. So it is important that everyone in the family work together to help your dog learn how to behave during this exciting time. Consistency is the key!

How does your dog get your attention?

A cold nose that nudges your hand to pet him? A pitiful stare from big brown eyes? Barking, jumping, urinating? Most dogs have a pretty good idea of how to get your attention. They also become creative when the usual things do not work. This is when we start thinking that they are out to get us, or they are jealous, or angry at us. But they're not – they are just really trying to get our attention somehow since the usual ways did not work. This can happen whenever a dog's people are preoccupied, stressed out, or paying attention to something else. This often happens when people are walking their dog and stop to chat with someone. The dog watches at first, and then he starts to seek attention. He begins by moving closer to his person, she pets him. That worked. But then the talking begins again. The dog moves close and she does not reach and pet him like before. Now what? He nudges her hand, begins to pull on his leash, all of which are not getting attention so he begins to bark. “AHHHH, that works,” he realizes. “Mom looks at me and talks to me and tells me to sit when I bark. Barking really is what I need to do for attention when my Mom is talking to someone out on a walk.”

Often the exact behaviors people do not like are the ones that work for their dog. Our reaction to their annoying behavior is very worthwhile reinforcement for our dogs. When our dogs misbehave, we often offer a visual response, a physical response, and a verbal response. It works for them!

How can this exercise help?

So, how does your dog elicit attention from you? If you are not sure, spend a week observing and writing down when you react to your dog and what behavior initiated this reaction. After you have made a list of all of the ways your dog seeks a response from you then you are ready to make a chart like the one on the next page.



Behavior	Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
Nudging							
Whining							
Pawing							
Barking							

Use this chart to mark every time your dog does one of the behaviors you have listed to try to draw a response from you – but now, instead of responding to your dog you will ignore him, get up and go put a tally mark on your chart. The mark will go in the box that represents the behavior and the day it happened. In as short as a week you will be amazed at the decrease in these attention-seeking behaviors. By ignoring them and moving away, you no longer are rewarding the problem behaviors. Your dog perceives that these behaviors will no longer work to get your attention.

Have fun with this exercise, and remember: each time your dog seeks your attention with one of the listed behaviors you will get up, walk over to the chart, and put a mark in the appropriate day and behavior spot. Initially you will catch yourself giving attention – that’s okay; it takes time and patience to change behavior, whether that behavior is yours or your dog’s. But getting up and walking away from your dog to do this activity works for two reasons:

1. It gives you a replacement response for when your dog seeks your attention. You are replacing responding to your dog with responding to the chart.
2. Your dog receives no attention if you truly just get up and go to the chart.

When and how often should you use this exercise?

Choose one behavior to focus on each day for a week. Evaluate the decrease in frequency and then choose whether to move to the next behavior or keep charting the same one.

Begin by picking the most frequent or bothersome behavior. Pin-point a ½ hour time each day that this behavior will most likely happen. Is this in the evening while you watch TV? When you eat? Think about the time and how you can really commit to following through by charting your dog’s attention-seeking behavior. Set aside the same amount of time each day to focus on this exercise. Soon, you will see a decrease in the number of times your dog elicits your attention with this particular behavior.

When doing any type of behavior modification activity such as this, it is normal for behaviors to get worse before they get better. This is because what has always worked for your dog is suddenly no longer working. Be patient and hang in there – you will see results! Please keep your Dogs&Storks presenter informed of any changes – good or bad – that you observe while doing this exercise.