

## **Out of Control Behavior Can Be Controlled**

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One of the most common behavior problems that owners tell us about is their dog barking, jumping up and getting out of control when greeting new people, especially at the front door of the home. We have personal experience with this, as our young Dalmatian Ashley is beside herself with excitement when the doorbell rings. Through domestication, we have probably selected for this trait of announcing the arrival of visitors to the territory. Most dogs are like Ashley, and are friendly when greeting other people, but a few may become aggressive due to territorial, protective or fearful motivations.

Several things influence how the dog will react to visitors, including the genetic predisposition of the dog, early socialization with unfamiliar people, and later experiences in greeting people. Owners can have a big influence on whether a dog's greeting behavior gets better or worse. If owners allow or encourage barking at the door to continue unabated, because they think this is the dog's "job", it may eventually be impossible to talk to people at the door over the dog's barking. Out of control greetings can often be prevented by teaching a young puppy or dog new to the household to greet people in a calm, quiet fashion. The dog can be taught that the desired behavior is to sit quietly, and that if he does so, all the attention he wants plus a tidbit will be his. Because the dog may be too agitated to learn this at the door, start teaching this behavior when the dog is less distracted. Puppy classes and basic obedience classes for older dogs can help teach these skills. Owners should never encourage dogs to bark, jump up or get excited in the presence of strangers no matter how cute it appears. By establishing consistent rules from the beginning and then letting the dog know that it is worth his while to follow them, out of control behavior can usually be prevented.

Once out of control behavior has become established, it is much more difficult to teach new behavior. We know from experience with Ashley, as she was out of control when she came to us. Teaching her appropriate greeting behavior has been a slow process. Luckily, her problem is just being too friendly. If the dog's greeting includes threatening or aggressive behavior to strangers, professional help may be required.