

SMALL DOG, BIG ATTITUDE

By Dee Ganley

Because of their size, small dogs can present different challenges than bigger dogs. Small dogs are famous for having a big dog attitude. They act like they're not afraid of bigger dogs and can start trouble. We often think that because they are small, we don't need to have the same expectations of them. Other times we don't realize that their size can be a danger to them.

Here are some things to remember when training and managing your little guys:

Jumping up

We tend to allow little dogs to jump up on us and other people. Unlike big dogs, they won't knock us over or put huge scratch marks all over us. However, jumping up is still an undesirable behavior and unless managed properly can be obnoxious.

This behavior should not be reinforced. Talking or touching encourages (reinforces) the jumping - so you need to be careful not to show your dog that you "notice" the jumping in any way. It is better to ignore the jumping up and just walk away.

So when is it ok? When you want the dog to jump up or to be picked up, **but** this is your choice not the dogs. Right?? To do this, you will need to teach a "jump up" command in just the same way that you teach sit or down. Just like begging for food, when out in public you need to ask anyone your dog jumps up to ignore them until they sit (and remain sitting to be petted). Most people will say that they don't mind the behavior, but in order to get the behavior to go away completely, you need to ask everyone to help you train your dog, which means that **no one** can reinforce the jumping behavior.

Don't hesitate to insist that the dog sit quietly for greeting before she is petted, or turn down the attention if the people are not willing to cooperate. Pick your dog up or just say you are in a hurry.

Be very conscious of how other dogs greet your small friend. If another dog is rushing toward your little one, pick her up until the other dog has settled down. If your dog growls and you are sure the other dog won't hurt your dog than place your dog on the floor and walk away from her.

Setting limits for the lap dog

Since they are definitely "lap dogs", it's hard to resist picking them up all the time. If they crawl up in our laps while we're watching television, or while we're in bed, we usually let them stay, even if they weren't invited. These things may cause problems if we don't set limits.

If the dog decides to get up and sit in your lap or get up on your bed, don't hesitate to put her back on the floor if you don't want her there. If you don't put your dog back on the floor, then she'll think that she is allowed to invade your space any time she feels like it. Then when you do try to move her off, she could growl or snap at you. The solution is: All attention from you is by invitation only!!!

If she is used to being in your lap when she wants, then she may also get protective or possessive if another dog or person comes up to see you. She might growl or snap at the dog or person. If she acts "jealous", just stand up slowly and let her roll gently off your lap.

She will be surprised and give you a funny look. Just say "too bad". Then get up, and if you have to just walk away. When your dog stops growling and barking then you can invite her back onto your lap. If she repeats the possessive behavior you repeat the standing up - 3 or 4 repetitions will make the point that only well behaved dogs get to sit in your lap. Remember - dogs do what works!

Carrying the small dog

We also have a tendency to just want to carry the smaller dogs from place to place, rather than let them walk. If we do it too much, the dog will not develop independence and confidence walking on his own. She should be trained to walk calmly on a leash and develop self control to sit and wait, at home and out in public.

However, if you are out walking her and a big dog comes along, don't assume that the larger dog will want to be friends. Small dogs are often seen as prey to larger dogs. In addition, the little dog frequently starts the argument, because she is really afraid. Then the bigger dog thinks your little dog is being rude. A smart rule is "don't let your dog interact with unknown dogs." Personally, I don't.

Why? Because it only takes a second for a big dog to latch on to the small dog and shake him - sometimes to death. This can happen even if the big dog is on leash. If you don't know the big dog and it's owner is letting it get too close, then don't hesitate to lift up your dog and hold her until the other dog has passed you. Your dog may want to let the big dog know that she's not afraid of him and try to growl and lunge, even while in your arms. Don't acknowledge his behavior. By continuing to walk away and avoiding any contact with the big dog, you're letting her know that you are in charge.