Voted #1 Denver Dog Training 2 years in a row

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**In-Home Services:** Animal Communication, Dog Behavior, Reiki

**I Can’t Control Myself - Impulse Control**

Impulse control in a dog is having the training and presence of mind to wait and be calm in order to be gratified. A dog who sits nicely while a leash is being attached to their collar has good impulse control. They know how exciting it is to go for a walk, but they understand that in order to go for the walk, they need to be leashed up first.

A dog who lacks impulse control would be jumping around, making his owner scramble to attach the leash, trying to rush out the door with no focus and awareness of his surroundings.

Impulse control can be taught, although some dogs can be taught easily with a few treats and a clicker and others will need months of small steps, delayed gratification to get their rewards – whether that be that they are not petted or given any attention until all feet are on the floor (as opposed to all over your body, raking your clothing and scratching your skin), or their food is not put down until they are calmly sitting. Building impulse control is often a gradual process of setting the dog up for success after success based on the previous performance.

Lack of impulse control really is determined by which part of the brain the dog’s mind is in. The more you do exercises and games that strengthen front of the brain thinking, the more impulse control patterns will be laid down in your dog’s brain. If you let them live in a hyper, adrenal state than they are using more of their reptilian core brain… fight or flight, with very little impulse control.

*What are some contributing factors to not having impulse control?*

1) lack of exercise, not allowing pent up energies to be released

2) breed characteristics

3) improper diet

4) former abuse or trauma

5) poor relationship between the dog and the owner

6) lack of socialization

**7 lack of training or harsh anxiety producing techniques**

**8) age of dog**

**9) temperament**

**10) personality**

**11) stimulating environments**

**12) not getting the dog’s needs met in general; dog doesn’t know how to operate his world**

**13) dog has not been reinforced when calm, only reprimanded (getting attention) when he isn’t**

**14) dog has received unintentional or accidental reinforcement through spontaneous laughter**

*How does a lack of impulse control affect dogs’ lives and those of their people?*

Dog’s lives:

Impulse control issues can be very challenging for dogs to deal with. As impulse control often goes paw in paw with not reading the signals well from other dogs, this issue can create challenging relationships between dogs. This can result is minor situations such as dogs not wanting to be friends to larger situations like full blown dog fights with injuries. Additionally, impulse control problems are one of the primary reasons dogs are relinquished to shelters, thus creating a very traumatic and confusing experience for the dog. When people choose to keep their dog with impulse control, it is possible for them to resort to confusing and punishing “training” methods to deal with the frustration of impulse control. These methods can result in the dog either becoming aggressive, or in some cases, beaten down to the point that the dog is no longer able to feel comfortable expressing his or her full self. Lastly, some people resort to leaving their impulsive dog home (no walks or outings) which results in a very depressing and boring life for a dog…possibly leading to the development of destructive behaviors used for entertainment by the dog.

People’s lives:

Impulse control issues with dogs can be exasperating and confusing to deal with. In some cases, people can end up being hurt, or having other kids or animals in the home get hurt by a boisterous, out of control dog. This can lead some people to feel they have no choice but to give up their dog. Additionally, people often get a dog with an idea of taking him or her places, going on hikes, etc. Impulse control issues can dampen this dream and lead to behaviors mentioned above. Also, impulse control issues can deeply impact the ability of a person to feel bonded to his or her dog as so often the bonding moments are calm, cool and collected.

*What are some common behaviors that result from lack of impulse control?*

Common behaviors would be jumping up, aggression, digging, excessive barking, barging out of open doors, herding/chasing, nipping, biting, humping, territorial guarding, fence aggression.

Some dogs will “invent their own games/behavior” which range from smart and fun to destructive.

*What management techniques might you use with the above?*

Leash, gates, crates, reliable cues

*What are some ways you could modify the behavior?*

Patient, creative, consistent, calm responses.

Precise timing of reinforcement.

Ignore undesirable behavior, reward desirable.

Reinforce default or automatic behaviors like check-ins, sits or downs.

Work toward reliable cues like sit, down, wait, stay, leave it.

***Exercises:***

“It’s your choice,” the impulse control game. Place treats in the palm of your open hand. As dog approaches hand and sees or smells treats, close your hand quickly so he cannot get any. Dog only receives a treat when he learns to move away from or ignore the treats.

“Red light/green light,” an exercise that works well in “wild” situations. We use the cue “red light” to calm down and “green light” to release and go. Dog only receives treats on red lights.

“Stop to calm.” In order to install the cue, first get the dog overexcited. Once he is bouncing around say “stop” in a firm (yet not aggressive) voice. Dog receives a treat when he calms down – could be a sit or down or stand.

Calming Ovals are another great method for promoting relaxation. **[http://youtu.be/mRn5fnaphDk](http://youtu.be/mRn5fnaphDk%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)**

Clicker Training. Start with “charging the click”. Dog receives a “click” as soon as his butt hits the floor on a sit cue, then he is offered a treat. This is the same technique that Pavlov used when training his dogs with a bell and food. The dogs would eventually salivate at the bell tone, even when there wasn’t food present. The clicker is our bell, which will help develop a strong response to cues like ‘sit’.

Look At That

Tell your dog to ‘look at that’ as you point in a general direction or at something in particular. When the dog looks back at you, say yes (click) and treat. This can be used to control your dog’s vision when around over stimulating or threatening situations. Your dog learns he can look and nothing bad will happen and when he looks back at you he is reinforced.

Clicking in Chaos – train, don’t correct

Even during the worst situations you can probably find something your dog is doing worth a click. Examples might be turning toward you, sitting, looking right at you, walking away from the stimulus – click with accurate timing and treat for any of these to reinforce these behaviors during chaos rather than focusing on the negative.

Replacement Behavior

Train your dog to perform a behavior rock solid that you can ask for to replace the one you don’t want.

I Hear That

If your dog tends to startle, alert, bark or react strongly, begin this exercise the moment you see any sign that your dog will do any of the above BEFORE he gets excited. Say “I hear that!” in a cheery attention getting voice and reward with a yummy treat when the dog reorients to you. This acknowledges and normalizes the sound so your dog doesn’t feel he has to protect or defend. Repeat as needed.