

Dealing with 'Humping' Behaviour

People often think that 'humping' has a sexual cause or is a dominance thing. In most cases, these causes are incorrect and 'humping' can be down to stress, over excitement (lack of self-control), displacement behaviour, attention seeking (where any attention off the owner is good) or play related (when two dogs are playing with each other). It is not always entire male dogs that carry out this behaviour; neutered ones do, as well as spayed and entire bitches.

What we need to do is distract the dog from carrying out the behaviour and teach it a more appropriate behaviour to carry out instead, such as sitting to greet people or to ask for attention.

We need to really sharpen the dog's response to the 'Sit' cue by only rewarding those sits that are fast and remembering to give the cue only once. Your dog already knows the sit cue, so ask him to sit, when he sits reward (small titbit). Repeat again but look for a slightly faster response and reward that one. Sits that are slower don't get rewarded, just say 'too bad' in a light tone of voice and turn away from the dog for a couple of seconds, before then asking him to sit once more. Reward the sit.

As your dog is likely to hump if he gets frustrated (i.e. the reward doesn't arrive when he expects it), carry out the sit exercise whilst he is on lead and just stand on the lead so that he has just enough lead to be able to stand and sit comfortably but not enough to be able to jump up at you.

Repeat the sit in different rooms in the house and with you stood up, sat in a chair etc. This will generalise the sit cue. Now we need to reinforce the sit when people come in and out of a room/house. Again with him on the lead, set it up so that someone will walk in from one room to another, ensure that you position yourself so that your dog cannot reach the person that is walking in. Ask them to walk in slowly and to stand still if your dog fails to sit. As they walk in slowly, ask your dog to sit and reward extensively all the time he is sat (use small moist food titbits and verbal praise but not touch). If he starts to get excited and gets up out of the sit, say 'too bad' and stop rewarding him and ask the person who entered the room to stand still and ignore the dog. Ask him to sit again and then reward. Ask your 'stooge' person to sit on a chair for a few seconds whilst you keep your dog in the sit (you may have to build this up slowly, one second at a time - see building a stay handout). Once your dog is calmly sat, ask them to leave the room again.

1. Repeat several times with this person and repeat on several different days.
2. Repeat using the same person but asking them to walk at their normal pace
3. Repeat using the same person but asking them to walk quickly
4. Repeat using the same person but asking them to run into the room.
5. Once the dog can remain steady with this person, use a different one and repeat steps 1-4

The more people you can practise this with and the more often (only needs to be a 10 minute session) the faster your dog will get the idea that he has to sit when people walk in. You may find that you will be able to do steps 1-4 in one session with your dog depending on how well the training goes and the speed of your dog's learning. Do repeat on several days though.

6. Once he is steady on lead, repeat the steps with his lead on but just training (so that you can restrain him if he breaks the sit).
7. Then repeat with him off lead
8. We are then going to change the picture slightly and have the dog just milling about as someone walks in and you will ask him to sit as the person comes in rather than having him sat before the person walks in. Have the lead on but trailing in case he doesn't sit as we don't want him to reach the person yet.

Sitting is a very calming behaviour for the dog and can be used to calm him down when he starts to get a bit OTT. So in the next stage of this training programme, we are gradually going to raise the dog's excitement levels and then ask him to calm down. Again, it is best to start this on a lead so that you can prevent him reaching his target.

1. With your dog on a lead (stand on it again so that he cannot jump up), talk to him in an excited tone of voice for a few seconds. Before he gets excited, ask him to sit, count to three and reward him.
2. Repeat step 1, but allow the dog to get a bit more excited before asking him to sit, count to three and reward.
3. If your dog likes to play tug with you and legs go on cue, then play for a second or two before asking him to release the toy and sit. Count to three and then reward.
4. Continue this process, gradually building the amount of time you ask the dog to play and the intensity of the game. If your dog fails to sit at any point, then the game has got too exciting too quickly, so go back to playing a less intense game for a while before increasing it again.
5. Repeat steps 1-4 with the dog on lead and with the lead trailing
6. Repeat steps 1-4 with the dog off lead.

You are now well on the road to teaching your dog self-control and polite behaviour. The next step is to have people approach him to pet him and for him to remain in the sit. He needs to learn that sitting will get him attention, jumping up or trying to hump will result in the person going away.

1. With your dog on lead, have a person walk towards your dog. If he sits of his own accord have the person continue to approach, if he tries to jump up, then have the person walk away.
2. Repeat until your dog sits every time
3. Repeat but have the person approach more quickly
4. Repeat but have the person clap their hands as they approach
5. Repeat but have the person skip towards your dog
6. Repeat but have the person talk excitedly to your dog
7. And so on.

The aim is for your dog to sit every time someone approaches him (if he is sat he can't be humping).

I know this seems like a long programme and a lot of work but you can be working on two or three of these exercises at the same time (just at different sessions). You need to read your dog to know when he is going to start his humping behaviour and pre-empt it with the sit cue. I may be a good idea that he wears a houseline for a few days so that if he does start to hump someone, you can call him away using the line to encourage him. Try not to grab his collar to remove him as he may end up getting frustrated that his game has ended and may turn round and try to bite. If he starts on you when you are sat down, get up and walk away.

I would also suggest that you teach him a settle cue so that he will lie calmly at your feet (see handout)

If you need any help or further explanation, please don't hesitate to contact me either on 07713 321707 or by email pauline@pawsitivelydogs.co.uk