

Four on the Floor: How to Teach Your Dog to Stop Jumping Up

POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT

Training using positive reinforcement is an excellent way to modify behavior, teach new behaviors and communicate with your dog in a friendly, consistent, and fair manner. Stated simply, positive reinforcement training means that your dog gets something she likes when she does what you consider to be a desirable behavior. Dogs will repeat behaviors that are positively reinforced (even after you cut down the frequency of the treats or other good reinforcers). Pet parents can use this method to address the problem of dogs who jump up.

When trying to eliminate the jumping behavior, people often think of ways to correct the behavior and will try to stop the jumping using punishment. In contrast, when using positive reinforcement training, you instead want to concentrate on what you want your dog to do, rather than what you do not want her to do.

So, when teaching your dog not to jump up, you want to reward your dog for having all four of her feet on the floor. Therefore this “Four on the Floor” behavior will be the first behavior you want to identify when rewarding your dog.

TEACHING FOUR ON THE FLOOR

As stated above, dogs learn by repeating behaviors that work for them. Therefore, in order to make the Four on the Floor behavior work for your dog, you will need to do several things: 1) Teach your dog that keeping all for feet on the floor will bring her rewards, 2) Reward your dog for not jumping up and 3) Ignore her when she does jump up.

In order to teach your dog Four on the Floor so you can begin rewarding her for it, you can use some of the following training games:

- **Doggie Ping Pong:** Here is one training game everyone in your household can play with your dog. Each person stands in opposite ends of a room with treats in hand. Then each person takes a turn calling your dog to him. While your dog is still several feet away, the caller places a few treats on the floor, just in front of the caller’s feet. More treats may be placed in front of the caller’s feet to continue rewarding your dog for maintaining Four on the Floor. When your dog finishes eating the treats, the next person immediately calls her and repeats the treat-by-the-feet game. Make sure to place the treat when your dog is approaching and while still several feet away to help orient her to keep Four on the Floor. Release your dog from this game, or any time you’re reinforcing a behavior with treats, with a signal or word such as “All done.”



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- **Meet and Greet:** Rather than having your dog approach you, in this game you approach your dog. Have treat reinforcements ready and approach your dog. Set a treat on the floor when you are one or two steps away from your dog, and continue placing treats on the ground so long as your dog is maintaining Four on the Floor. Over time, progress to approaching and treating from your hand. When treating from your hands, keep both hands low on approach and during treating so your dog's head stays level and doesn't have to rise up to get the treats.

To continue teaching this behavior, have everyone in your household play similar games with your dog on a regular basis. It's important that everyone sends a consistent message to your dog through their actions, because like people, dogs do not learn effectively when they receive mixed messages.

SET YOUR DOG UP FOR SUCCESS

In your daily greetings with your dog, have treats ready in hand before engaging her. When she approaches you, set the treat on the floor near you, before she jumps up. This helps to focus your dog's attention on the floor, and eliminates the automatic jump-on-approach response. Continue placing treats on the floor while your dog maintains Four on the Floor. Have everyone in the household do the same to teach this behavior.

By giving your dog rewards for maintaining Four on the Floor, you can then contrast that reward with the withdrawal of your attention when your dog does jump up. Ignoring your dog when she jumps up now becomes useful information, as your dog compares this lack of attention to the attention and rewards she does receive when she has Four on the Floor.

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOUR DOG DOES JUMP

If your dog jumps up during any of the above training games, or during your daily interactions with her, immediately withdraw all your attention, including saying anything or looking at your dog. For example: draw your hands and arms in toward your body (similar to crossing your arms across your chest) and turn your head away from your dog. When she returns to Four on the Floor, you can again give your dog your attention by looking at her, but don't give her any treats yet. Avoid rewarding her with food immediately after a jump; instead it's better to think of her returning to Four on the Floor after a jump as a doggie "do-over." You can then "reset" your dog by taking a step backward and reinforcing her at that time for keeping Four on the Floor by placing a treat on the floor before she has the chance to jump up again.

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A common (and automatic) reaction to a dog's jumping is to say something like "No!" or "No jumping!" however, any attention given during jumping will perpetuate the jumping behavior. Attention of any kind, positive or negative, rewards your dog for her behavior, so it is best to withdraw all attention when your dog jumps up, and practice giving attention only when your dog has Four on the Floor.

THE FINISHING TOUCHES

You can work towards helping your dog generalize the Four on the Floor behavior by reinforcing her for keeping Four on the Floor whenever she is near or greeting new people. It may take time for your dog to generalize this behavior. For example, while she may have learned she gains nothing by jumping up on you, she may still try jumping up on other people. Therefore it's important to inform people that you are working on a training plan, and have them practice giving your dog attention only when there are Four on the Floor, and removing their attention when she jumps. This will teach your dog that jumping up never works, all the while showing her that the Four on the Floor behavior does.

After your dog has mastered Four on the Floor, you can begin building on this foundation with additional behaviors. One example is to add a "sit" behavior onto the basic behavior of Four on the Floor greeting requirement. You can build the sit into a more stable behavior by giving your dog treats while she's sitting, delivering each treat to her mouth while she maintains the sit position. When you're finished, remember to release her with "All done," or a release word/signal of your choice.

