

Establishing Boundaries

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Establishing boundaries with your dog is how you establish your role as the leader. If you don't become the leader then your dog will try to, more often than not his attempts at being in charge will go awry. The easiest way to set boundaries is by defining your personal space. The area he can't enter without your permission. You want to be the one to decide where he goes, when you give affection, and how rambunctious he can be. This is important for every dog but even more so for high energy anxious types, as they are always searching for a job. If you don't make the rules chaos reigns supreme. So let's get started!

Establishing your personal space or "bubble" is relatively easy. The hard part is you have to be consistent, persistent and firm. You also need to recognize your dogs body language. We are going to start with going in and out of doors. You have to do this several times a day no matter what. Then you can apply the same principles to all the other interactions with your dog. The easiest way to do this is to outline a space around your door, I like to say at least a 4'x4' area. If you have a already defined space like tile that changes to carpet use that as your "line in the sand". If not I recommend putting masking tape down to establish that line. This is more important for you to establish a visual mark that the dog can't cross until you invite him to. It's important because he will try to crowd the line by putting a toe or foot or 2 feet across it. They can be subtle and sneaky about it and pretty soon your 4' boundary is only a foot! Use the tape!!

So you have your lines drawn, now your going to take Rover outside. When you go to the door if he's following on your heels you're going to stop him at the line. If he sits that's fine but it's not a requirement at this point. The goal is for you to be able to go to the door and open it while Rover waits behind the line. He will probably try to cross it and push his way past you and out the door. But the new rules apply and he needs to wait. When you get to the line cross over it and turn and face Rover. Don't look at him or talk to him. The only touching you will do is pushing him back with your body and blocking him from crossing the line. Do not grab his collar and pull or drag him. That will just encourage him to pull away. As Rover tries to push past you or walk around you just block him by stepping from side to side and towards him. You can make your blocking range larger by holding your arms out to the side with your palms forward. If he is intently looking at the door, I will block his view with my legs by standing in front of him. Most likely you will be moving around quite a bit from side to side and forward. Don't back up though as this "invites" him across the line. Depending on the dog this may take from 2-3 minutes to 20. You just have to be patient and persistent, remember every time you do it will be easier because Rover is learning the rules and understands what you want. Some of the antics Rover may do are trying to jump on you, push by, barking, biting at your toes, looking at the ceiling etc. Yet you great leader that you are will correct him by keeping him out of your space. When he eventually gives up and either stands, sits, or lays down and looks at you, then you can allow him into the space and out the door.

Sometimes this takes another step or two. If when you let him cross the line he loses all sense and tries to knock you over and bolt out the door then you need to back to square one. Many times once I have his attention I will open the door and block it with my body so it's harder for him to push past me. If he stays calm and focused on me then I will step out the door and invite him out. If he is trying to get by then go back to the start and push him outside the line until he is calm again. This takes a lot of repetition initially, but over even 2-3 days if you are firm, consistent and persistent, you will see a huge improvement.

Now you can take this basic exercise and apply it elsewhere, like getting in or out of the car, waiting to be fed, coming to sit on the couch with you. It's not hard to do but if you're having trouble and need help just call and we can schedule an appointment! Good Luck and remember good leadership makes for happy dogs!