



THE BARRACKS VET SURGERY MOSMAN

EXUBERANT DOGS

Are all dogs hyperactive at some stage?

Actually, no. Ideally they will have learnt dog manners from older dogs. Experienced dogs will use calming devices to approach others. You may notice them licking their lips, walking slowly with a slow tail wag, approaching in an arc rather than a straight line, laying down, or sniffing tails before going face to face. These dogs are trying to keep things peaceful and avoid unpleasant confrontations.

Why must hyperactivity be controlled?

If your dog, (for simplicity let's assume it's a he) has not picked up this dog behaviour, he may romp towards new situations, which is bad dog manners. This may frighten another dog into an aggressive response, or it may injure an old or smaller animal. Worse, it may accidentally cause injury to toddlers, the unstable or elderly people. There are many examples of "lovely" breeds such as labradors injuring people and pets, and plenty of court cases which follow where the owner is held to blame.

How can I instill calm behaviour?

You may have tried to discourage rough behaviour, but your dog finds interacting with people or dogs so very exciting it's worth getting yelled at or punished.

Dogs often want attention. But if you give your dog the attention he seeks while he is being over-exuberant, you reinforce that behavior. To make him behave nicely you need to reward the good behavior in a way that is worthwhile for him, while you ignore the unwanted behaviour.

Try this method: Spend a few minutes a day teaching him to sit. Pick a quiet time when he is hungry and you have his attention and eye contact. Suspend a treat over his nose and straighten your arm towards the space above his tail. Say "sit" as he leans back and release the food as his rear hits the ground. Repeat many times, you can even drip feed him his entire meal this way. The next day reward only 90% of the sits, and so on until only the best, quickest 10% of the sitting is rewarded. Next time your dog sees or hears a stimulus, (such as the doorbell ringing or the appearance of a prospective playmate) tell him to sit. Keep a really good treat with you and reward the sit as you tie him up. Go towards the stimulus without him. After a while he will learn to look at you, not the stimulus. Once he responds this way, approach the object together and tie him up progressively closer to the stimulus. Reward him with a big treat once he is sitting. Ignore any noise or struggling.

If he backslides, make the "game" easier by tying him up further from the focus of his excitement.
The key is to remain calm yourself, and never raise your voice in frustration or anger. Crying or yelling may associate anger with what you are trying to teach.