

TEACHING A NEW RESPONSE TO THE DOORBELL

- Until the new behavior is mastered, it is important to avoid the full strength stimulus (stranger coming up to the front door).
- Daily training exercises lasting 5–10 minutes should be performed.
- Identify fabulous rewards for the dog; usually this is delectable tiny food treats.
- Start the training with no distractions present (nobody at door, house quiet, other pets elsewhere).
- The dog should be taught to go to a greeting spot (mat, rug, bed) on voice command; the spot should be within sight of the front door but a few feet away from it. Only proceed to the actual door work when the dog can reliably go to the greeting spot and hold the sit/stay for 10 seconds when there are no distractions. See Tranquility Training Exercises handout for additional training tips.
- Set up daily exercises with one family member handling your dog and the other family member being a “visitor.” The family member playing the “visitor” should have spent time with the dog just prior to doing the training exercises.
- The dog should be on a leash or there should be some type of barrier across the door that allows full visualization of the “visitor” but no access (screen door/baby gate) to the outdoors.
- Have the “visitor” approach the open door and either knock gently or ring the doorbell. The handler should give the command to your dog to go to the greeting place and sit/stay. Reward good behavior. Since the stimulus level is low (familiar person, recently seen them) the dog should be able to perform the desired behavior and be rewarded.
- If the dog isn’t compliant, give no reward and reduce the intensity of the exercise (maybe leave out knocking/doorbell ringing) at the next attempt.
- Repeat until the dog is very obedient about going to the greeting location every time the “visitor” approaches the open door and knocks/rings.
- Then close the door slightly so that it is open three-quarters of the way and repeat the entire sequence.
- Continue gradually closing the door over multiple sessions until the “visitor” can approach a closed door and knock/ring and the dog will hold a sit/stay at the greeting place as they enter the home.
- After this has been successfully completed with the family member as the “visitor,” try to recruit a less familiar person to be the “visitor.” Return to the open door and repeat until your dog will hold the sit/stay even with a nonfamily member knocking/ringing bell of a closed door and then entering the house.

In other situations, it may be necessary to just change the emotional state of the dog when they hear the doorbell before any training can begin. The exercise below may work better for some pets, especially those that bark excessively without severe aggression.

- Favored food rewards should be identified for the dog. These must be extremely delectable; generally this means table food.

- The dog is placed somewhere else in the home with one family member, but not restrained.
- Another family member quietly leaves the house and comes to the unlocked front door. They must also have a large supply of the delectable treat with them. If the dog could see them from windows, the windows must be blocked.
- They should ring the doorbell and the dog is allowed to run to the door unimpeded.
- As the outside person hears the dog approach, they open the door, throw the treats inside and close the door.
- When the dog gets to the door, if the correct food has been chosen, the dog will usually eat the treats and perhaps also bark.
- Then the outside family member rings the bell and throws in the treats again.
- A training session is usually only one to three repetitions since when the dog realizes it is a known person at the door, they may not bark.
- After several sessions, many dogs will decrease their barking or at least diminish emotional arousal to the doorbell so other training techniques can be utilized.