



## Door Dashing

We have all been there- you open the door to bring in groceries or to take out the trash, and the second the door is open a crack, there goes your dog, running down the street. From your dog's perspective, this is a fantastic opportunity to sniff the world or visit a neighbor dog. This is especially problematic if your dog won't come back. Regardless of why your dog finds the world outside so alluring, with management, training and persistence, this behavior can become a thing of the past.

- **Management-** While managing the situation is not the best solution, it is very important to prevent your dog from practicing the behavior. Any behavior that is practiced can become permanent and the freedom that comes following door dashing is a strong reinforcer. One way to prevent this from happening is to use a baby gate to prevent access to the door. Another is to use an exercise pen to effectively barricade the door from the dog. Finally, simply having a leash ready and available whenever accessing the door can help you prevent your dog from running out.
- **Remove the temptation-** Make sure your dog gets plenty of time outside: take a walk in the neighborhood or let your dog hang out with you in the front yard. The forbidden is always exciting, so let your dog get comfortable or even bored with what is on the other side of the door. Consider walking your dog on a long leash so that he feels free to investigate the world. Freedom is a huge motivator. It's always good to try and meet your dog's needs with something you find appropriate.
- **Train an Alternate Behavior- Teach Wait at the door.** Use the steps below:
  - Start with your dog on a leash and position yourself between your dog and the door. When teaching this behavior, start at an uninteresting door to get the steps down before trying this at the door the dog likes to dash through.
  - Reach for the door handle. Before your dog moves forward, reward him for remaining in position. Repeat this step until he starts to look at you instead of the door in anticipation of the reward.
  - Your next step is to reach for and jiggle or turn the door handle. Reward your dog for not moving toward the door and for looking at you.
  - Gradually, begin to open the door a crack. If your dog moves forward, simply close the door. If your dog does not move forward or looks at you, reward. Repeat this step until he is reliably pausing while you begin to open the door, gradually opening to door further. Make sure to reward every incremental step.
  - Once the behavior is reliable, continue to practice until you can step out of the door while your dog remains in position. If your dog fails, you moved to the next step too quickly. It is critical to heavily reinforce your dog for not moving.
  - When you are completely confident that your dog will not move toward the door when you open it, you may add the verbal cue, Wait. Ensure that your dog is rewarded each



time he waits. Reward him on his side of the door so that waiting is more rewarding than running out of the door. Then, make sure to use a Release word to indicate it is okay for him to go through the doorway. Used consistently, your dog can learn to automatically pause at every threshold, waiting for you to Release him.

- Train for an emergency- Work on getting your dog to reliably come when called. If you have not trained your dog to reliably Wait at the door, you will at least have the opportunity to call him back. Coming to you should be trained separately from Wait. Practice with a long line and reinforce with fabulous treats. Try not to call your dog and immediately shut him in the house. Your dog should think that he will get a great treat for coming to you and will be allowed to continue his outside fun. If your dog does escape but then comes back, REWARD him! This sounds counter-intuitive. From your dog's perspective, if you yell at him when he comes back because he ran out the door, he will associate coming to you with being punished.

Door dashing is a scary behavior for you and a potentially dangerous one for your dog. With some careful management and a little training, you can safeguard your beloved four-pawed family member from practicing this dangerous behavior.