## Door Darting Dangers

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Do you have a dog that looks for every opportunity to slip out any open door or gate? Do you nearly fall over yourself daily trying to make it to the door before he does? Then chances are that your dog has never learned that going through doors are an “invitation only” event! Whether you live in the country or in the city, dashing uninvited through the front door may be a life or death situation for your dog. It’s never too late to instill good manners in your canine pal, but be warned, it will take patience and perseverance on your part, as well as cooperation by every member of the family in the home.

Before you begin, however, ask yourself a question: why does your dog dash out the door? The most likely answer is because he is bored and anywhere outside looks like a more likely opportunity for fun and exercise than he is currently getting. It’s even more fun if he thinks you are playing chase with him! So even as you are starting your training plan, remember to include more daily walks (START if he is getting none). Play interactive games with your dog, even in the house, that requires him to use his brain. These will leave him more tired and overall more satisfied with his life. Simple games like a modified “hide and seek” with his toys or even with you can stimulate and exhaust. Feed your dog from a food-dispensing toy instead of just handing him a bowl of food twice a day. Food that he has to work for is so much more satisfying.

Now you are ready to work on your plan to teach your dog to WAIT at the door.

First, if you are unsure of your ability to react faster than your dog can, go ahead and put a leash or long-line on him. This will allow you to step on it or have another person behind the dog hold it, just in case you misjudge your timing while in the early stages of training.

Take your dog to the door, and using your body – not your hands – move him back a safe distance from the door and tell him in a very firm (not loud) tone of voice “wait.” If your dog knows a sit command, you may have him sit for this. Keeping YOUR BACK TO THE DOOR, reach for the doorknob. A truly dedicated door-dasher will already be trying to head to the door. Bring your hand back in front of you, and wait for him to back off a step and look up at you. When he does, once again using your body, move him back to a place a little further from the door and repeat the reaching for the doorknob step. When he no longer reacts to the reach,

open the door just a crack. The second he moves forward, or gets up from the sit, quickly close the door and move him back into the original place.

DOG BRAIN NOTE – dogs are reward-driven animals and are always looking to have their behaviors rewarded. While you may think this only means tossing a treat or playing with a favorite toy, a reward is, in fact, anything the dog wants. And what the door-dashing dog wants is OUT. So, by allowing him to use his brain to figure out that APPROACHING THE DOOR causes it to be closed, and WAITING will cause him to be invited outside, you are creating a REWARDING BEHAVIOR. Rewarding Behaviors are those that dogs will repeat over and over, as they result in something pleasurable for the dog.

Continue to increase the amount that you open the door, little by little. If you are practicing at a door that opens into a fenced area, say a backyard, you may then use the opportunity to “invite” him out when he remains waiting until the door is fully opened. This teaches the cause and effect of the Wait command. If you do not have access to a fenced area, use a leash and invite him out when he waits. This MUST become an integral part of every single time you take your dog out the door. Do not ever rush and say there is no time today. Waiting at the door must be done EVERY TIME for your dog to understand that it is required in order for him to go outside.

So, to review –

* Set your dog (and yourself) up for success by starting off with a leash
* DON’T allow your dog to get too close to the door in the first place
* FACE your dog (your back to the door) so that you are the thing your dog must pay attention to
* Train in tiny increments – opening the door only inches at a time
* Close the door immediately at any sign your dog is ready to bolt
* Reward quickly by taking your dog outside when he “gets it.” (very important step)
* Practice, practice, practice!
* Use every single door in your house for additional practice (it’s easier to teach without the distraction of outside on the other side!)
* Add exercise to your dog’s day – a tired dog is a good dog
* Remember that door-dashing is a highly Rewarding Behavior for your dog so it will take time and patience to teach him that Waiting is also Rewarding!