



Connecticut Humane Society  
701 Russell Road  
Newington, CT 06111  
800-452-0114

## Over-Arousal and Unruly Behavior

- What is it?** Over-arousal is when a dog becomes too excited, even in seemingly calm situations. Technically, it is a biological response to hormones – much like the response adrenaline causes in humans – in which the dog’s central nervous system is heightened. This causes the dog to be easily excited.
- What are the signs?** Over-arousal in dogs is characterized by jumping, grabbing hands/body parts with their mouth, biting at clothing and/or biting the leash. These behaviors often occur in seemingly low-key situations, but are most common during more stimulating events such as play, leash walks, an owner returning home, loud/high-pitched voices or people running.
- What are the causes?** Some dogs come “hard-wired” to become easily excited, while others haven’t learned how to control their excitability. Over-arousal is most common in bully breeds and dogs that spent much of their puppyhood in a shelter. Factors that can increase the potential for over-arousal include long periods of confinement, off-leash play/rough play, under-socialization and poor impulse control.
- How is it diagnosed?** Over-arousal can be diagnosed by a licensed veterinary behaviorist, a certified behavior consultant or certified applied animal behaviorist. These professionals will ask many questions about the specific problems behaviors and conduct thorough evaluations to determine the proper diagnosis.
- What is the treatment?** Dogs prone to over-arousal learn obedience commands and play games with their owners that help them practice self-control. These dogs learn how to greet people without jumping, sit for things they want and are walked with special harnesses or collars. Consistency, patience and positive reinforcement are essential.
- What should I do at home?** The most essential part of living with a dog prone to over-arousal is avoiding the situations that trigger the behavior. Owners must identify when the dog’s excitement level is increasing and respond appropriately. Playtime should be calm and structured (i.e. no tug-of-war, the dog should sit before fetching a ball). These dogs typically do not play well with children because their high-pitched voices and fast movements encourage excitability. While over-arousal can be improved with training, dogs hard-wired to have over-arousal will need owners prepared for a lifetime of managing the dog’s excited behavior rather than assume the dog will “grow out of it.”
- What should I watch for in the future?** Owners of these dogs should watch for excessive jumping, mouthing, grabbing at clothing/body parts and increased amounts of leash biting. If your pet was adopted from CHS, please contact our Behavior Department with questions or concerns. If your pet was adopted elsewhere, you should look for a licensed veterinary behaviorist, certified behavior consultant or certified applied animal behaviorist in your area and secure a consultation immediately.