

How to Tame Prey Drive in Dogs and Stop the Chase!

While modern dogs are domesticated creatures that can be trained to behave in a civil manner, their instincts can always come out. All dogs have prey drive. It's that need to stalk, chase, and kill prey. Even the most well-trained dog has it in their DNA.

Dogs that have a [noticeably high prey drive](#) can be difficult to deal with. They often chase everything that moves. This can include everything from small animals to other people.



If your dog is acting on their prey drive a little too much, you need to take action as soon as possible. These dogs pose a huge safety risk. The last thing you want is for your dog to cause harm.

While you can't get rid of this behavior completely, there are things that you can do to keep it under control. By understanding why your dog is acting the way that they are, you'll be better equipped to handle it.

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Why Do Dogs Chase?

Dogs chase for a number of reasons. The biggest is that it's an innate reaction. Despite centuries of domestication, dogs still harbor many of the same traits as wild canines. They know how to hunt and will do so when the opportunity arises.

Some people think that [chasing is done out of aggression](#). In most situations, that's not the case at all. It's because taking down prey is what these dogs were born to do. Some breeds, such as Border Collies and German Shepherds, have a higher prey drive because they were specifically bred to hunt and herd.

Another reason that dogs chase is because the act is rewarding for them. Most animals and humans will run away at the sight of a dog speeding towards them. When the offending stimuli that caused them to start the chase goes away, it's viewed as a success.

If they manage to catch the animal that was the focus of their attention, it's even better. The more chances that a dog has to chase something, the more that the act is viewed as a positive experience. This is why it's important to stop the behavior as soon as possible.

How to Train a Dog with High Prey Drive

Dogs with high prey drive will need a lot more training than those that don't. You'll need to be able to manage your dog when distractions are around. The goal of training is to set your dog up for success.

Instead of attempting to get rid of an innate behavior, you're giving them the tools they need to move past the problem. Here are a few essential techniques that can make all the difference.

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Focus

Before your dog even starts chasing, they'll do a number of things. They'll often scan their surroundings and stare at the target for a brief moment before taking off. You can

use these actions to your advantage and stop your dog before the chase begins. By teaching your dog to focus on you, it'll prevent them from finding a target.

To teach your dog to [focus on you](#), hold a treat between your fingers and bring it up between your eyes. When your dog glances at the treat, give it to them as a reward. You can then add your verbal command as you're moving the treat between your eyes. Repeat this process and make your dog hold your gaze for long periods of time. Then, slowly introduce distractions until you're comfortable enough using the command in real-world environments. This command can be used to snap your dog back to reality when they start looking for prey.

Drop-Down

The drop-down method can be used once your dog has already found something they want to chase. You're essentially breaking their focus with treats and giving the critter time to get away. To be successful, your dog will need to already know how to get in a down position.

When you notice that your dog's locked onto a target, immediately command them to get down. At the same time, drop a treat between their feet. When you do this, they'll look down at the treat and break focus. Quickly move the treat to their side so that their head turns away from the target completely. At that point, you can walk your dog away and reward them.

Here's a video from KeenDog on how to learn your dog to drop down.

Leave It!

This is a popular command that's used by many trainers. It can teach your dog when to leave things alone. Start by placing a treat on the floor. When your dog goes to get it, tell them to leave it alone. If they're persistent, cover the treat and block them from getting it. Once they back off, you can reward them.

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Callbacks

Callbacks are used to get your dog's attention once they've already started running towards their target. Your pup should already know basic recall commands. The goal of this training exercise is to apply the commands they already know to chase situations.

Attach a long leash to their collar and get an item to capture their attention. The leash should be long enough for your dog to start a chase. Throw the item away from you. This should capture their attention and initiate a chase.

Call your pooch back. If they don't turn around, give the leash a gentle tug. If they abandon the chase to return to you, provide them with a treat. Repeat this exercise on a regular basis until they turn back around without giving it a second thought.

Walking a Dog with High Prey Drive

Dogs with high prey drive often experience issues on their walk. Walking around your neighborhood exposes your dog to a lot of potential stimuli. There's plenty of critters running around, bicyclists zipping past, and other dogs taking a walk. Here are some ways to prevent a chase.



Don't Stop

You should never stop during your walk. This can be perceived by your canine companion as a moment of tension. They'll think that you spotted prey and will scan their surroundings to find it too. Keep moving forward the entire time you're out. This will decrease the chances of your dog getting excited. They'll be able to focus solely on the walk.

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Use Your Commands to Stop the Chase

The training commands from the previous section can all be used during your walk. They should only be attempted once your dog has mastered them. Keep a watchful eye on your pup and look out for signs that they might want to chase something. You should use your focus command the moment you notice that your dog is acting strangely.

If the chase cycle has extended beyond the scanning phase, use the appropriate command to bring them back to reality. It's also a good idea to use the focus command periodically throughout the walk to make sure that your dog is always wary of your presence.

Keep Things Unpredictable

Taking a unique path each time you go for a walk is a great way to keep your dog focused. Sticking to the same routine every time will get boring. Your furry friend will know what to expect and what to do. As a result, they may start to look for potential prey.

Even if you have to walk on the same path each time, there are things you can do to keep your dog on their toes. Simple acts like walking around obstacles, taking sharp turns, or changing speeds every few minutes are enough. Your dog will have no choice but to focus on what you're doing, leaving no time to look for prey.

Staying Safe

While your dog may not mean any harm by their chasing, not everyone knows that. Dogs with high prey drive are the first to be labeled as aggressive. You need to make sure that you and anyone that may come across your dog remains safe.

Use a Leash at All Times

Your dog should be kept on a leash at all times when they're not in the confines of your home or yard. Even if your dog is great at responding to commands, there's always a chance that their urge to hunt will be stronger. You should avoid no-leash places like the dog park as much as possible. These locations have a lot of distractions that could trigger your pooch.

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Install a Fence

A high-quality fence is a great way to give your dog some freedom while still keeping them contained. You should also install a lock that prevents people from accidentally letting your dog out.

Avoid Peak Hours

Early mornings and late evening are prime walking times. It's when sidewalks and streets are the busiest. You can avoid a lot of issues by simply taking your dog for a walk at different times. Hold off for another hour in the morning and leave a bit earlier in the evening so that there are fewer distractions on your walk.

Training Tools

If your dog is still having trouble holding back even after all of your training, you can invest in tools that are designed to grab your dog's attention in the event of an emergency. One such tool is a training collar. They wrap around your dog's neck like a normal collar but have features that can command attention.

Some products utilize a [small spray bottle located beneath their chin](#) while others produce a high-pitched tone. With a simple press of a remote control button, your dog will stop their behavior and focus all their attention on you.

Over to You

With a bit of extra training, you can manage your dog's prey drive. You'll be able to put a stop to potentially dangerous chases before they begin and take your dog out for walks without any issues.