

# Lickety Split

**Q** My dog is very sweet and affectionate. Lately, he has started to lick me and everyone he meets. Plus my clothes! What is the best way to change this behavior?

● Arden Moore ● Steve Brooks

**W**HEN A DOG LICKS YOUR FACE, THE love hormone, oxytocin, and the desire hormone, dopamine, are both elevated. However, doggie kisses are not always out of affection. Puppies lick in order to get milk from their mothers and blankets or clothing are similar to nursing. Licking becomes a way to get affirmation or for grooming. Dogs lick your face because they love the tasty flavors of that juicy burger dripping down your chin or scented lotions...sometimes they crave salt.

Licking can turn into an obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). In fact, many dogs lick themselves raw out of stress, anxiety or even boredom. Excessive licking can indicate underlining medical conditions, so I recommend talking to your Vet about your dog's diet, and, if possible, bring a video of the dog displaying the behavior. In my experience, most dogs with this behavior are attention seeking, insecure, or conflicted. Dogs repeat behaviors if that behavior works for them. It could be that you are somehow (unintentionally) rewarding your dog for this behavior.



I suggest positive training methods to teach and build confidence. Try: "go to your bed" and "down /stay". Next, ask for a few sloppy kisses and let the self-rewarding experience of the kiss be the reward. Give no feedback for the kisses. Wait until the dog pauses for just a second, and then mark the fact they stopped with "good boy!" Calmly say,

"Thank you, I love you too! Go to your bed and stay." If a dog has been properly trained, then going to their bed and relaxing will become a better reward than licking your face; they can lick their favorite chew toy instead! 🐾

**ARDEN MOORE** hosts the Oh Behave weekly radio show on [petliferadio.com](http://petliferadio.com), is founder of the [fourleaguedlife.com](http://fourleaguedlife.com) pet community and creator of National Dog Party Day. **STEVE BROOKS (CPDT-KA)**, founder of Steve Brooks K9U has been teaching dogs a solid foundation of real-life manners, specializing in behavior problems for more than 20 years. [stevebrooksk9u.com](http://stevebrooksk9u.com).

**E**ACH TIME, YOU REACT TO HIS KISSING BARRAGE by pushing him away or yelling at him, you are giving him attention. Remember, any attention (good or bad) is still attention to a canine. In time, this unwanted habit can transform a dog into becoming an annoying Licky Lou.

Dogs lick for many reasons. Young puppies instinctively lick their mother's chin and face in the quest for chow. And the main reason some dogs shower their owners with kisses is what Aretha Franklin sings about: R-E-S-P-E-C-T. Your dog is seeking your attention and your approval. In his mind, you outrank him. Because your scent is heavy on your clothes, he has expanded his show of respect by slobbering your clothing as well.

Forget about pushing your dog away after that first 'kiss.' Odds are this action will only motivate him to deliver more licks because he thinks he failed to communicate his message the first time. Or, he may perceive it as a signal to play and heap on more sloppy kisses.

Instead, teach your dog the "kiss and stop" command. Conduct mini-training sessions during quiet times, such as when your dog just wakes up, after a long walk or any time when he and you are in a calm mood. Allow him to lick your face or hand once, say, "good kiss," and give him a small treat. Repeat a few times. Now you're ready to teach him the "stop" command. When he moves toward licking you, put your hand in front of his face like a traffic cop halting cars and say, "stop." If he doesn't lick, dole out a treat and praise him.

It can be tough to bottle the enthusiasm of a tail-wagger who is happy to see you when you come home, so you need to teach him a more acceptable greeting rather than a face bath. Teach him to shake paws or perform a trick, such as sitting up or fetching a favorite toy when you come in the door. In time, he will learn that the big payoffs—your affection and a tasty treat—occur when he has licked his licking habit. 🐾

