

Cool, Calm and Collected:  
How To Enjoy a Peaceful Homecoming  
by Marcia Albert

Almost six months ago I drove into the garage after having been away for about four hours. Suddenly, I became aware of how tense I was, almost as if I were gearing up for some kind of confrontation. I got out of the car, and as soon as I opened the door leading into the house I came face to face with the cause of my tension. My three wonderful, happy (wildly happy) dogs were jumping, barking, running in circles and generally acting like I was the best thing since the discovery of baked liver treats. Part of me was frustrated at their behavior. I was tired and my patience was running thin, but I also felt guilty about feeling annoyed. After all, here they were celebrating my homecoming; shouldn't I respond with some excitement towards them? So, I geared up and started talking in a happy voice, and before long we were all in a bit of a frenzy.

A while later, after the fur settled, I decided that over time I had gradually begun to dread the first ten minutes of coming home. The problem was that I wanted to come home to a restful, quiet place; and while my home is usually like that, getting through "reentry" had become mayhem. So, I did some reading and found a trainer who had done some extensive work on just this issue. She is an English trainer, Jan Fennell; and her book, [The Dog Listener](#) is interesting, informative and based on good research. I followed her suggestions for dealing with homecoming chaos, and here is what I did.

- When leaving or arriving, I did not look at, speak to or touch my dogs at all. If one of them jumped, I turned my back. If he tried again I walked in the opposite direction. If he became too insistent I left the room.
- When they settled down, I continued ignoring them. After they were quiet and left me completely alone, I waited for five full minutes. If they were still settled and off on their own, I called them, gave each a treat and a pat and went on with whatever I was doing.
- If they began to get excited as a result of my attention, I moved away and began the steps again, regardless of how many times it took. (seldom more than twice)

I know that this is not an easy exercise, and it must be practiced each and every time you come or go. Ignoring your dog's excitement and welcoming behavior may seem heartless and cruel, but the dog shows enthusiasm toward you because you either started it or responded to it in the first place. Dogs that are relaxed when their owner's come home have fewer issues with separation anxiety. Dogs that are relaxed when their owner's come home may very well be calmer when guests visit. Dogs that are relaxed when their owner's come home are, in their own way, acknowledging their owner's leadership and authority. Try it. I think you'll be well rewarded.