

CORRECTING PROBLEMS ON THE DOCK

Often, people ask me about certain problems their dogs have developed on the dock. There are a few simple strategies you can use to get your dog back to their usual jumping status. Some are general strategies, such as:

1. Just give them time. All athletes, in all sports, have their slumps. Dock diving is no exception. The 20 ft. jumpers might jump flat for a while, then go back to 20 ft jumps or better.

2. Give the dog a break from the dock. Hold off on practice for a while. I know, I know, the temptation is to work them and practice even harder. But often taking a break will renew their spirit and passion for the sport. When they return, you'll see a different dog. How long to hold off? That all depends on you and your dog. With Sally, I'd need to hold off for at least a few weeks. With other dogs, it might be a month or two. Keep working out with them and training on land (to keep up their condition), but no dock diving.

The above are general suggestions, but say you want to work on just one certain problem. Here are some strategies that might help:

YOUR DOG BEGINS STOPPING AT THE END OF THE DOCK

Let's say your dog has always jumped just fine, but for some reason, he's beginning to seem uninterested and stops at the end of the dock. Try any of these strategies:

1. Change your throw toy

2. Has the water temperature changed? Did your dog have a bad experience such as slipping at the end of the dock?

3. Move him up to about the 20 ft. mark or even closer. This will help keep him focused and interested in you. If this works, keep jumping him from this spot until he's jumping well and then move him back little by little.

4. After you set your dog, walk backwards talking to your dog, keeping eye contact, shaking the toy. One word of caution: Be careful as you're getting near the end of the dock!

5. If you're doing the chase technique, switch to the place and send for a little while.

6. At practices, let him jump with some of his best buddies.

Most of all, keep it fun and playful. If you start stressing, your dog will sense this and it will only make his problem worse!!

YOUR DOG STARTS TO JUMP FLAT

If your dog has always had good pop to his jump and suddenly starts to jump flat, this can be very frustrating. It can take feet off of his jumps. Here are some suggestions to try:

1. Again, change throw toys or start him closer to help focus him on the toy.
2. Hold the toy at a different higher angle. Rather than holding it low and in front of him, hold it up higher and release it higher.
3. Throw the toy very short so he can catch it. This will make him jump shorter, but that's okay. Let him catch it several times. This gets him refocused on the toy and, hopefully, chasing it. Then start throwing it a little farther each time.
4. Use a hurdle for practice. Hold the toy up over and just behind the hurdle and have the dog run, jump up and over the hurdle and snag the toy from your hand.

Another reason some dogs begin to jump flat is that they have been introduced to Speed Retrieve. Some dogs cannot do both and distinguish between the two types of jumps required. This is not to say you should stop Speed Retrieve, but that you might need to work some with the Big Air jumps to get the pop back.

YOUR DOG LEAVES THE DOCK EARLY

This problem plagues many very good dock dogs. It is extremely frustrating to watch your dog give up 2-3 feet with each jump. To make matters worse, it is probably the most difficult to correct.

First, try finding his best starting spot. This might take quite a bit of practice, moving him up and back until you find the place where he will hit on or at least closer to the end of the dock. Another technique is change your standing position at the end of the dock. Most handlers stand facing the opposite side of the dock with feet open. The photo below shows what I mean.



Another reason a dog might take off early is that he equates the “take-off line” with your back foot, or the foot he sees first. He will take off every time exactly where your back foot is planted.

The way to correct this requires some practice on your part. You need to change your stance so you are facing the pool, with both feet right on the edge and your back to the dog. That means you have to turn your head to look back and release your dog. That also means you might have to hold on to the pole on the side of the dock to steady yourself. Again, this will take a lot of practice on your part (to get used to throwing like that) and on your dog’s part (to get used to having your stand and throw from that position).

Please remember, no matter what the problem or what strategy you use for correct it, *you must keep it fun for the dog*. Dogs can easily read our affect and dispositions, especially frustration. But, if you’re having fun, he’ll have fun. Six foot jump or 26 foot jump...good pop or flat jump...let the dog have fun *while* you are working on the problem.

If you want more specific training techniques, we suggest you contact [SportMutt](#).