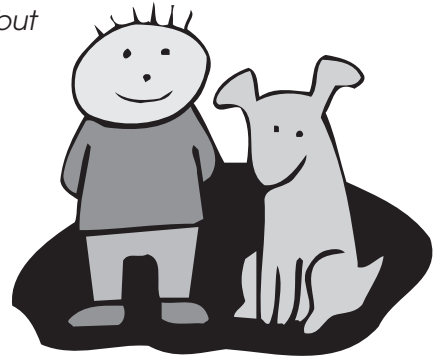


How to Avoid and Treat BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS



Dogs and people have lived together for thousands of years, but that doesn't mean we always understand each other. Living with pets can sometimes be as frustrating and confusing as living with people! The following program will help you make the most of your relationship with your dog.



Dogs are pack animals - they are social and like to interact with people and other dogs. You can use this trait to your benefit; your dog will do what you want if it earns him praise or petting AND he considers you a leader in his pack.

This is a key point. All dog packs have a leader dog who makes decisions for the rest of the group. Other dogs are subordinate to the leader. Your dog should never think he is the leader in your house. You are the one who should decide when to eat, when to go out, when to go to the veterinarian for a check up, or when to get a nail trim. As with children, dogs who have rules to follow and respect for their parents are well behaved. Many behavior problems arise as a direct result of lack of leadership on the part of their owners.

Dogs behave as though they prefer knowing that you are in charge, and often seem much happier when they understand that you have taken charge. Following the advice below may be harder on you than on your dog! It's lonely at the top, so give your dog a break and take over. He'll love you just as much.

Also keep in mind that dogs are very sensitive to body language and visual cues. Behaviors that you don't think much about may have meaning to your dog, in a way that may not be what you intended to say! For instance, two people talking face to face is confrontational in a dog's body language. Standing side by side is not. You can learn to take advantage of nonverbal cues.

The following suggestions are an effective and humane way to let your dog know that he or she is safe, well loved and NOT the leader of the pack. Keep in mind that love is not related to social status, and that most dogs live in relaxed harmony when the social hierarchy is clear, no matter where they stand in it.

These are not practices that you must follow every minute of the day. Who wants a dog if you can't ever pet it just for fun? But it's not good to cater to your dog. Your dog's behavior should drive your decisions on how to treat him or her. If your dog has always been a perfect gentleman you may not need to change a thing you're doing. But if your dog gives you problems, follow all these "social distance" suggestions.



If Spot just bit you, totally ignore him for two days to notify him there's been a change in the household. Don't speak to him or look at him, even while feeding or letting out. Then follow this program to the letter for at least a month before giving him any slack. If Ginger ignored a command at the park today, adopt these tips for a few days. Applying "social distance" when your dog is misbehaving and rewarding with praise and attention only when he is good is the key to good behavior. Reward the behavior you want to continue to see!

SO HERE'S HOW:

1) PETTING

- Pet only for obedience (come, sit, down, stay, shake, etc.). Reward obeying commands with attention.
- Keep petting brief (don't indulge your dog).
- If your dog demands petting, either: look away (fold arms, turn head up and away from the dog) or ask for a sit or down and then pet when he obeys.
- If you want to pet your dog, call him to you, don't go to him.

2) PRACTICE LOOK AWAYS

Don't let your dog demand play, food or petting. If your dog gets pushy, simply cross your arms, turn your head upward and to the side away from your dog. (This is an example of the body language mentioned earlier) If your dog counters by moving to your other side, turn your head the other way.

This is good practice to do any time your dog approaches you if he is very dominant and pushy. It is especially important if your dog has been aggressive towards you.

3) TEACH LIE DOWN AND STAY

A good, solid down and stay is one of the best learning tools. It teaches your dog to be patient and to wait for your command. You can practice while watching television. Start with one second stays for the first few days, and work up to longer and longer ones. After three weeks most dogs can handle a half hour down stay during a quiet time of day. Correct breaks with a body block (act like a traffic cop), or a downward leash correction - not by simply repeating "down" and "stay" over and over again. If your dog gets up 25 times, then correct him or her 25 times with the same actions and tone of voice. Do NOT include anger in your correction. Be very matter of fact.



4) WAIT AT THE DOOR

Alpha (pack leader) dogs have priority access to limited resources, which means they get to push out the door first to get something they want. This is why a lot of dog fights occur at doorways over who gets to go out first.

Control the space in front of the dog and you control the dog - use body blocks again to herd him away from the door. Or head toward a door or doorway and then suddenly turn and go the other way if your dog tries to get ahead of you. This puts you back in the lead. Praise and pet your dog when he starts to turn around after you and keep moving until he reaches you. Practice this as you move around the house until your dog is content to stay behind you and follow your lead.

5) FOUR ON THE FLOOR

Dogs interpret an increase in height as an increase in status. Dogs who sleep up on the bed are especially impressed with themselves. Keep dominant dogs on the floor, not up on chairs, couches or beds. If you want to cuddle, get down on the floor, ask for obedience and then pet when your dog complies.

6) TEACH HEEL

Leaders are in the lead. Teach your dog to stay at your side while you initiate pace and direction.

This basic obedience program should make treating any other behavioral problems easier, if there are any. A dog that looks to you for direction can be taught almost anything. He will be happy to work for what he wants and it helps keep his mind occupied constructively. Integrate this training into your day by asking your pet to perform some action whenever it wants to go outside, get dinner, play ball, etc. Letting you be in charge will soon become second nature to your dog.

Much progress has been made in the past few years in understanding how dogs think and learn. We are able to deal with problem behaviors much more effectively when we understand how a dog's mind processes signals and information. Most problem behaviors are NORMAL dog behaviors that are simply unacceptable to the humans they live with. Redirecting and retraining can make our canine companions better and happier pets.



Problem behaviors which we can help you deal with via proper training include:

- Barking
- Aggression
- House soiling, submissive urination
- Separation anxiety
- Digging
- Running away, boundary training
- Fearfulness
- Lunging/pulling on the leash

Here are a few more tips to make training more effective:

Do your homework! There are reams of books available to assist in training. Be cautious, as some are better than others. Outdated or cruel methodologies are still widely available in print. Read more than one and pick the methods that seem to make the most sense to you.



Consult with us, a good dog trainer, or a behavioral specialist. What works for one dog may not work for another. The experience and training of those educated in the field of canine behavior and training is invaluable.

Consider using a Gentle Leader head™ halter. This is a different style of training collar which takes advantage of the dog's natural response to pressure over the muzzle and behind the ears (points dogs use to signal each other about status and control), rather than a choke collar. Gentle Leader™ halters are more humane and more effective and can aid in solving many behavior problems. We have a short videotape on the use of this system in our office.

Using food as a reward for learning new commands is fine but **don't give a food reward every time.** Giving food intermittently means your dog will perform commands for you even when you don't have food, and also prevents weight gain.

Keep all training positive and consistent. There is no need to scold or punish your dog if you tap your dog's inborn need to follow a leader and respond eagerly.

Please call us any time you have questions or problems with your dog's behavior. We have information on most problems and can refer you to a trainer or specialist if we can't help you ourselves.

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