

Dog Behavior Training (For People)

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Welcome to A New Way of Looking at Your Dog!

Adopting and bringing home a dog is one thing, living and dealing with the behavior issues while maintaining our (and the dog's) mental health is quite another. If you have adopted a dog from a shelter or rescue group, you have saved a life. Please remember that the behaviors our dogs exhibit have been influenced by their past experience in concert with their genetics and is no fault of their own. The purpose of our program is to help us better appreciate why our dogs behave the way they do and to learn what *we* can do to influence or modify their behavior to have a better behaving, more relaxed and safer dog. Before we can expect our dog's behavior to change we first need to change our own. Dogs need conditioning, people need educating.

The bottom line: Training is a matter of manipulating the consequences of our dog's behavior. Our dog's performance and personality is determined by our ability and interest in accomplishing this as well as acknowledging their cognition and sensitivity as a sentient creature with feeling and emotions

"Training is not accomplished by brute force, but through understanding the animal."

- Nickolas Pavenkov (Russian Lion Trainer)

Perspective:

A basic misunderstanding between us humans and our dogs is a *conflict of communication*. Animal behaviorist, Trish McConnell, PhD summarizes this accurately saying, "Our natural primate behavior clashes with the natural behavior of dogs." In other words, we move and behave in ways that can be offensive and threatening to dogs. Dogs are "sophisticates" of reading body language and our primate body language (signals we send with our voice and body movements), often and unintentionally send a conflicting message to the dog. Many people think that dogs should behave the way we tell them to behave and when they don't, they are labeled "stupid". Can you imagine the stress of living in a culture where no one understands your language?

Another basic misunderstanding involves a flaw in the relationship most people have with their dog. When we "humanize" the dog we set up the dog for failure. A dog has a different perception and means of self-expression. Using a dog as a human substitute or object of worship frustrates the dog tremendously. "Problem" behavior is really a misunderstanding of normal dog behavior and misconceptions about certain responsibilities involved in having a dog in our home.

Breed/Genetics/Species:

It is *critical* to acknowledge, properly *anticipate* and manage the genetic predispositions (predation, protection, etc.) of our dog in order that they not rehearse an inherent behavior for which they will ultimately become addicted that could result in a catastrophic outcome.

Socialization:

The very best thing you can do for your dog is to *socialize* him. Expose him to as many different environments and people as possible such that he always has an enjoyable experience. Ask people to offer him a treat if he is receptive so that, “Other people = good things for me”. Use a light hearted mantra like, “Here is a friend!”

Dominance:

Most people equate “dominance” with “aggression”. Dominance is a relationship among animals that live in a group. The dominant animal controls the valued items or resources. For dogs, these things are food, toys, resting places, and attention. Dominance and Aggression are not the same.

Aggression:

There are different types of aggression, but what we need to appreciate here is this: Aggression (behavior that is *obtrusively* assertive) is normal for dogs and what makes it unique to each species is the tools they possess; dogs have teeth, cats have claws, deer have antlers and hooves, people have money, power, guns and knives, etc. When aggression is directed at other dogs it is normal in the context of the situation. Because we have included dogs in our own social order dogs will react to people in the same way they would toward another dog and for the same reasons. The problem, however, is that because we lack the proper skills for communicating our intent, we will invite that normal response from the dog, get hurt as a consequence, and then blame the dog for being a dog. In nature, aggressive behavior usually diminishes when it does not meet resistance because the other animal knows how to diffuse the confrontational attitude.

Children, Dogs and Safety:

“Dog bites are the number 1 public health problem for children, outnumbering measles and mumps combined, (AVMA).

The reason for this is that children (and adults) do many things that make dogs nervous and feel threatened. Children are most susceptible since they are at face level with a dog. “Hugging” is foreign to dogs and many dogs have a low threshold of tolerance for this, but parents allow their child to practice it. “Patting” on the head is a primate behavior, dogs do not “pat” one another and, in fact, this is somewhat of a punishing experience for the dog. You get the idea. The bottom line: The issue of dog bites is not a dog problem; it’s a people problem. It is up to each of us to become as aware of this as we can. As the saying goes, “the buck stops here.”

“A dog cannot be bad, he can only be a dog.” – Itzhak Bentov

“Leader of the Pack” = Priority of Access to Resources:

Dogs are very social animals and living in a human family is equivalent to living in a pack. All packs require a leader and dogs feel more secure if the hierarchy is clearly established with an effective leader. “Every dog in a human family has the innate need to follow a human leader as a result of his pecking order instinct. For this reason it is unhealthy to treat a dog as an equal. A dog cannot be equal due to limits of genetic makeup,” (C. W. Meisterfeld). Being an effective leader does *not* mean being the biggest, loudest, or meanest. A true leader has the respect, trust and devotion of its followers.

Defining yourself as the leader is a matter of having the *priority of access to the resources* that are important to your dog. Letting the dog know that these things can be acquired by their exhibiting certain behaviors invites the dog to perform those behaviors. Turning this around we might say that we help the dog learn how they can manipulate the environment to get what they

want! The *timely* provision of “rewards” or “reinforcements” to the dog encourages them to repeat that desirable behavior or response!

The secret is, identify what you want the dog to do and generously reward that behavior. This occurs moment by moment. Over a period of time the behavior you have been rewarding will be the behavior you are seeing repeated and practiced by the dog. After the behavior becomes established, we will give it a name, or command.

“There are no dumb dogs, some just need to live with smarter humans.” – Bob Maida

How Dogs Learn:

Dogs learn by association.

Example 1: “My dog doesn’t seem to like men,” (likely because of a bad prior experience). Men = bad feelings.

Example 2: “Every time I jumped up, when I was a puppy, people gave me attention. That was good. Now, every time I jump up people yell at me and/or push me away. At least that is better than no attention.”

Vs.

“Every time I jump up, the person ignores me. But every time I keep all four feet on the floor, I get lavished with attention and treats appear in front of my face. Ah ha! I can make good things happen by keeping my feet on the floor when someone approaches!”

It is up to us to see that the environment is structured to provide the best possible learning for our dog. The reason for this is because the dog (and us) learns from the environment. It is the teacher and we are a part of the dog’s environment.

“My dog isn't stubborn, he's just smarter than me!” - Marni Fowler

Dogs Are Selfish:

Dogs are egocentric and are out to please themselves. They will seek that which brings them the greatest satisfaction, (soft cushion, meat vs., kibbles, etc).

Management and Boundaries:

Besides being aware of our own behavior, management of the dog’s boundaries is another key to helping the dog learn as they interface with the environment

The biggest mistake people make when getting a dog is giving it *too much freedom* so that the dog experiences almost unlimited boundaries. These boundaries include both physical *as well as* behavioral boundaries. When *too much freedom* is allowed, the dog will “push the envelope” of what it can do to get what it wants! In doing so, the dog develops what is called, “self-acquired random behaviors”. The most common of these behaviors are the distasteful and obnoxious behaviors that makes life miserable for both owner and their dog and usually results in the dog being punished, relinquished to the basement, garage, backyard or surrendered to the shelter, or killed. If both physical and behavioral boundaries are clearly defined to the puppy or older dog

these unpleasant behaviors will be prevented or minimized. Whatever you want your dog to *not* do, prevent him from doing it proactively, rather than responding “after the fact.” Success at performing the undesirable behavior is self-rewarding and addictive.

3 “R”s”

- **Restrict** the dog from doing what you don’t want him to do, (i.e. chewing on the furniture leg), but, if caught doing so...
- **Redirect** the dog to an acceptable chew item,(i.e. chew bone)
- **Reward** him for the new, redirected focus.

Nothing in Life Is Free or No Free Lunch:

Most of our dogs have nothing to do. The emphasis in this program invites you to encourage your dog work for everything the dog wants. This includes food, toys, access across the outdoor threshold and your attention.

Positive Reinforcement:

Positive reinforcement is any consequence that follows a behavior and results in an increase in that behavior. If you see a behavior you want the dog to repeat, reward it! (The “window period” of time to provide the reward is an art and part of what we will be working on in class). Positive Reinforcement is the method we will be using to train our dogs in this class.

Resources are rewards:

Allocating the resources (with the correct timing and rate) that are important to the dog at the time, will invite the dog to perform that behavior that got him the reward.

Thoughtful management of the dog and boundaries, practicing “No Free lunch” and Positive reinforcement for the behavior that you want, makes life easier for both human and dog.

For the rest of this week:

- At the start of the day, portion out the amount of food you normally serve your dog and have every family member who can safely do so, feed the dog from his or her hand. We want the dog to appreciate that all good things come from (you). Have someone hold the dog at the other end of the room or house and prompt your dog to you, reward with the food fed from the hand. Have each family member have a portion of the food and call the dog back and forth between you, rewarding the dog with food from the hand. After the dog comes to you enthusiastically, change the criteria such that instead of just coming to you, they have to sit, *then* they are given the food.
- If you have a “pushy” dog that demands attention by nuzzling your hand, make the requirement for getting the attention a “sit”.

If You Are Attending Our Training Class, Please Bring With You Next Week:

- One hungry dog, (don’t feed your dog their last meal. If you “free feed” consider not).
- A snug collar from which the dog cannot slip out and a 6-foot lead, (no retractable leads, please).
- An unlimited supply of *really* favorite dog treats that you have in your pockets, or consider an apron or fanny pack if that is easier.
- An enthusiastic handler and other family members. (Please make other arrangements for small children who would require your monitoring).
- A small “throw” rug (for bigger dogs) or carpet square (if you have a small dog).
- Plastic shopping bags to pick-up and dispose of poop. (Always, please ☺)

