

ALPHA....."ALL" DOGS NEED A PACK LEADER

Learn how to be a good alpha/pack leader!

Dogs are innately "pack" animals. They instinctually need to belong to a pack because they know they cannot survive without a pack. This applies to every dog, regardless of their basic personality or temperament. Every dog pack is governed by rules and guidelines established and enforced by the ALPHA/PACK LEADER. All the remaining pack members have defined positions within the "pack pecking order/hierarchy". In the dog world, this pecking order/hierarchy and the role of the Alpha are essential to the ultimate "survival" of the pack. The Alpha is entrusted with the responsibility for establishing the pecking order, pack rules, and maintaining order within the pack. The strongest natured dogs, the meekest natured, and all in between still need to be part of a pack and need that pack to have an effective alpha/pack leader who ultimately ensures the safety, security, and longevity of "the pack".

When we bring the dogs into a human/dog pack, the same "pack needs" exist. There must be an Alpha/leader and the remaining pack members will be positioned within the hierarchy of the pack. It is crucial that WE provide a stable human/dog pack environment. You must be the Alpha/pack leader and must provide the rules, guidelines, and structure for YOUR pack.

Being a strong and effective alpha/pack leader does NOT mean being "harsh and/or overbearing!" It means learning how to communicate alpha signals ALL dogs WILL understand. Communicating proper and correct "alpha signals" to your dog is the closest we ever come to speaking "dog". An effective alpha/pack leader rules with clarity (in a manner the dogs can understand), with consistency, compassion, understanding, and respect. The alpha/pack leader will be firm and stern when a situation requires it, BUT always within reason! Inconsistency creates confusion and gives mixed pack signals which reflects an insecure, unstable pack. This is very disconcerting and stressful for the dogs! If the pack is unstable, another dog within the pack is required to try to step up and create a strong, stable pack that will secure the safety and longevity of the pack. This is what governs the most basic nature of being a dog!

There are some basic tenets that establish the Alpha and maintain a viable pecking order within the pack. The most basic of all of these tenets is FOOD. In a dog/dog pack, the Alpha always eats first. The rest of the pack gets the leftovers. However, even the eating of the leftovers is governed by the pecking order of the rest of the pack members. Therefore, one of the most fundamental ways you can establish your Alpha position is to completely control the dog(s)' food. This means when they eat, how they eat, and even...IF they eat.

When you feed the dog, hold the food bowl in your hand and wait until their "rump hits the ground" before they get their food. If your dog does not know the "sit" command, this is a perfect opportunity to teach them and it will occur almost automatically!! If your dog does know "sit", have them sit before you place their food down. If they do not know "sit", just hold the bowl and WAIT, not saying anything at all. They will hop, jump, whine, bark, etc. When these behaviors do not get them their food, they will "sit" as they ponder their strategy for getting their food. Take advantage of this momentary "pause for thought" SIT. *Place their food down immediately!* You have to be quick as this pause... "rump in the ground" may only last a second or two. The dogs think fast where food is concerned and they will determine an alternative behavior very fast.

Additionally, you can use this moment to say the word 'sit'. Eventually, the dogs will learn the word means their 'rump on the ground' and you will have taught your dog to SIT. This is a nice side benefit of this exercise.

You can further reinforce the Alpha 'food control' by keeping your hand on their bowl while they eat. You do NOT want to make mealtime stressful. So, you do not want to be scolding or correcting the dog during this process. Once the dog seems to really understand the 'sit for food' and is fully accepting of your hand on their food bowl, you can periodically pick up the food bowl while they are still eating. Do not say anything, just stand up with the bowl in your hand and wait

till they 'sit'. Then, immediately return the bowl to them to finish eating. Remember to NOT make this process stressful, just normal and matter of fact.

This will reinforce your complete control of their being 'allowed' to eat, how and when. This translates in 'dogspeak' as the Alpha allowing the dog to eat. Additionally, this will help to offset or avoid the tendencies of many dogs for 'food guarding'. You will want to follow this same 'rump on the ground' procedure for any treats given throughout the day.

You need to ensure that YOU, the Alpha always eats first. Many people will feed the dog right before they eat, so the dog will leave them alone. Or, they will set the dog's bowl down and then sit down to eat themselves so the dog is eating while they eat. WRONG!!!!!! If you feed them first or set their bowl down before your eat, you are establishing THEIR position as Alpha...eating first. You must completely finish your meal and clear the table BEFORE you give your dog their food.

If the dog's normal feeding time is going to be at least two hours before you eat, you can go ahead and feed them. This is enough time for them to separate them eating and you eating. It will not infringe on the concept of Alpha eating first. If you plan on sharing a bit of your food with your dog, you will want to set aside their tidbits. Give them to your dog only AFTER you have finished eating and have cleared the table.

NOTE: In household with multiple dogs, you need to reinforce the 'pecking order' of the pack **UNDER** you. This means whatever dog is directly under you in the pecking order **MUST** have their food bowl placed down **FIRST**. They must be given all treats **FIRST**. If you randomly place the food down or disperse treats, you are (as the Alpha) sending mixed and confusing messages as to the Alpha governed hierarchy of the remaining pack members. This would be a prescription for disaster as the dogs will not know or understand their positions. The pack hierarchy will remain unsettled and 'up for grabs'. This scenario will ultimately lead to dog fights among these dogs as they try to sort out the pecking order among themselves.

FRONT PAWS OFF THE GROUND:

Grab your dog (gently, but firmly) by the jowl hair. This is one hand on either side of their face. Lift them up so their front paws are off the ground. Hold them there and look them directly in the eyes. DO NOT be harsh....but, do be firm, stern. At this point, you can say whatever command may be appropriate. For example, say whatever you want them to understand and relate to this form of reprimand....no bark, no bite, no chew, play nice...Speak in a normal voice, but in a firm, stern tone. Hold this position for 5-10 seconds. Then release them with no fanfare. DO NOT shake them or shove them away. DO NOT scream at them.

Remember that actions speak louder than words. You do NOT want to create an aggressive reaction/reflex in your dog by treating them in an aggressive manner. Aggression breeds aggression!!!!!!

THE BED OR FURNITURE:

This part applies if you allow your dogs on the furniture and bed, as I do. If you walk into a room and your dog is on the bed or furniture, have them get off. DO NOT shove them or push them off. Just verbally tell them to get down. Use a calm voice, you are not upset....they have done nothing wrong. You can even use a toy or a treat to coax them off. The point is to get them off the bed or the couch...WHY??? So, you can immediately call them back up on the bed or furniture. What is the difference? You have had them get off and they then are 'allowed' back up with your PERMISSION.

Now, this does not mean they can not get on the bed or furniture without your permission (if that is your choice). My dogs have full access to ALL furniture at all times. This is just an 'exercise' that reinforces your alpha status. You do not have to do this every time they are on the furniture...just whenever the mood strikes you. Remember, the point is YOU are the ALPHA & your word is LAW!!!!

USE THE DOG'S EXPECTED BEHAVIORS TO REINFORCE ALPHA STATUS:

This is an easy one. When you are in a chair, couch, or the bed and the dog comes over to get up with you...tell them OKAY just before or as they jump up. This is you giving permission for something they were going to do anyway. Pretty neat, huh! Use what they are doing as an opportunity to 'give YOUR permission'. Also, you can do this when they go to jump in the car.

THE DOOR:

When you go to open the door for the dog to go outside, as you open the door...say OKAY or OUTSIDE (whatever command). Again, this is as an opportunity to 'give permission' for a known, expected, desired behavior. You can take this approach as far as you choose. After you have done this for quite some time, you can start teaching the dog to WAIT for the release command even when the door is open. Do this gradually....they need to experience TOTAL success during this process. Help them to NOT make a mistake.

You can do this by telling them to WAIT, open the door just a small amount (not enough for them to get out), tell them to wait again. NEVER scold or reprimand...you are teaching. Then, say OKAY as you open the door enough for them to exit. Remember, you want them to succeed....make sure they do. This may mean using your foot to block their path or gently holding their collar WHILE they are learning. Also, use your voice to reinforce the command....WAAIIITTTT!!!! This is normal tone of voice. When teaching, you want to always PRAISE & TREAT. So, be sure to praise and treat them for the 'wait'...even if you helped them achieve the wait. Their eventual understanding of what you want, the praise, and the treat will help them WANT to do this behavior.

REMEMBER, NO BEHAVIOR IS TAUGHT OVERNIGHT. IT TAKES MANY REPETITIONS, CONSISTENCY, AND PATIENCE. THE DOGS NEED TO BE REWARDED, REINFORCED FOR CORRECT BEHAVIOR TO ENSURE SUCCESS!!!!!!

As the Alpha of your human/dog pack, you can chose to rule with compassion and respect OR as a "bully". We all know from our human relationships, anyone that rules as a bully is NOT respected. This makes for a very unstable environment. I hope you chose to have your dog respect you as their Alpha/leader...NOT TO FEAR YOU. Please rule your pack as a respected, compassionate, and fair ALPHA/LEADER!! The dogs are at the mercy of their pack, of their leader. As the alpha, YOU determine the life your dog will lead, the quality of that life, and the relationship you will have with your dog.

Deb Duncan
COME, SIT, STAY...Canine Etiquette
Behavior & Training Consultations
[Email Deb by clicking here](#)
Tel: 972-276-9569