

# With proper training, alpha dog can learn to take the back seat

## Consistency is key to shaping behavior of dominant pet

**W**ith 750,000 reported and many more unreported dog bites in the United States each year, do you ever wonder who all those Bowsers are biting? Is it postal workers, trespassers or men wearing suspicious-looking hats?

Surprisingly, as with similarly serious crimes in humans, Rover's favorite targets often live at home. To most of his doting housemates this problem is a big puzzle. One moment the canine's as charming as a Casanova on a first date. The next he's throwing more barks and bites than Mike Tyson at a pre-fight press conference.

You might think such a dog must be borderline bipolar; however, such brain-based psychological problems are relatively rare in dogs. More commonly the scenario says that this pooch wears the pants in the family. While you're out earning the dough, Rover's at home making up the rules. No taking his toys, no sitting on his couch. No disturbing his sleep. Whether he's a 100-pound Rottweiler or a petite Pomeranian, you know immediately when you're out of line.

### Dog in charge

You reprimand him, reach over his head or stare him in the eye — all actions indicating higher rank — and he snaps or growls. Even petting him in the wrong spot or hugging him when he's

not in the mood may earn you a snarl.

How did "His Highness" get to be so bossy? It started in puppyhood when he was treated like a prince. He got praise and petting for his slightest deeds, and free food was delivered on request like room service at the Hyatt. Then he won tons of toys without even trying and the best human beds and couches to rest his bum. His life without rules made him feel like royalty and since no one else took the lead, he declared himself dictator.

### Ending Rover's reign

With careful planning you can carry out a successful coup. But before you begin, if Rover's intact, get him neutered to take the testosterone away. This will help curb his drive to be at the top.

Next, avoid all situations that trigger a battle between you and your Bowser. This is a war of wiles where you supposedly outsmart your less cerebral companion.

Then take control of all the important resources — food, furniture, toys and anything else Rover likes including petting, praise and playtime. You'll ration these resources as selectively as the Seinfeld Soup Nazi.

For starters, all human furniture is off bounds. Deny access to the room containing the cherished chair, barricade the bed with uncomfortable books or boo-

by trap it with the electrostatically charged Scatmat.

Next teach the ruling Rover to say please by sitting patiently while awaiting your next cue. When Rover's ravenous, put him on a leash or practice in an area devoid of distractions. Let him see that you have a treat so that he knows what he can earn and then hold the food in your hand. At first he'll wonder why the delay; usually you deliver on demand. Then he'll try to get your attention by doing whatever's worked in the past — maybe a few boisterous bounces or a string of wild woofs. Rather than barking back "No" or placing a hand on him to keep him down, make like an icicle and freeze so that he knows you're ignoring him.

This will give Rover's wheels a workout as he tries to figure what's going on. Stick to your plan of remaining silent and stationary and when he finally sits, give him the treat before he has a chance to get up. Next, move a few steps and repeat this exercise. Practice this 10 or 20 times in a row and Rover's light bulb is sure to stay lit.

Now, you're really ready to roll. From here on Rover must automatically say please for all of his privileges, no matter how small. Wait for him to sit before tossing his toy, letting him out the door

or putting his food bowl down. Make him earn each kibble of food and pat on the head by performing this and other behaviors that he knows.

At first this change is a challenge for owners. They want to pet the pooch when he pushes his way into their laps instead of ignoring him until he's polite. Or they accidentally let him barrel by to get out the door rather than waiting for him to drop his derrriere and look to them for direction.

### Learning more

By bearing down and making all the changes at once you make the message much clearer. And once Rover reads the rules you've written in your actions he'll be glad to relinquish his reign.

For more information about preventing aggression as well as dealing with aggressive dogs, view the videos [www.nerdbook.com/sophia/movies.html](http://www.nerdbook.com/sophia/movies.html). For information on the scatmat go to [www.scatmat.com](http://www.scatmat.com).

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