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Relationship/Leadership Exercises

To prevent dog bites and preserve the human-animal bond, it is extremely important to be educated on the dynamics of the human and canine family unit.

Today, dogs are frequently and unknowingly treated like group leaders by:

- being allowed to get up on beds and furniture
- eating out of an overflowing food bowl whenever they'd like
- coming and going as they please
- having lots of unearned possessions to guard
- having subordinates fan over them with constant free petting
- being able to demand to be played with, petted, taken out or left alone

These owners treat their dogs like kings and queens one minute, and then wonder why their dogs are not obedient when they ask for a sit or down-stay. **The tips and exercises outlined below will help your dog regain her rightful place as a respected, responsible member of the family.**

Dogs have a definitive method of relating to one another that relies on **posturing, social ritual and avoiding confrontation**. Avoiding confrontation is very important to dogs. They understand that if they are injured in a fight, they cannot hunt, forage and travel to get food, and if they cannot do those things, they will die. Therefore, it is **important for you and the other humans in your family to appear as strong, dependable, consistent, non-confrontational leaders** who know the posturing and social rituals that make sense to your dog. Being strong, dependable, consistent and non-confrontational are all excellent signs of a good leader.

It is extremely stressful to most dogs to be without a leader. Because of this, it is our job at **Santa Monica Paws** to teach you how to become kind and benevolent leaders, or role models, for your dog.

Most dogs will develop a more relaxed and confident demeanor with a strong desire to please their new role models once the leadership role has been assumed. Most of you have heard of the saying, "follow the leader."

We classify all dogs in leadership role as being **dominant assertive, independent,** and sometimes **controlling**. An **aggressive** dog is defined as hostile, combative or even offensively or defensively antagonistic. The words "dominant" and "aggressive" are not interchangeable. Remember, a submissive dog can become aggressive if provoked.

When a dog looks to his family unit for a leader and sees no leader, he figures he must fill the position himself because every group leader needs a leader and a pecking order. Some dogs are forced into the leadership role and become stressed with the responsibility. Some dogs with dominant temperaments will manipulate their way into the leadership role, taking advantage of their uneducated owners. **In instances when a dog is forced into the leadership role, he will use aggression to maintain order and consistency. In instances when the dog is self-appointed into the leadership role, he will use aggression to maintain his status in the family unit.**

Whether a dog is forced into the leadership role or manipulates his way into it, his maneuvers are the same. Dogs assume leadership in a very canine way.

They may:

- become pushy at the front door
- attain the most central and elevated sleeping station
- require that they not be disturbed when resting
- bark at anything
- have first dibs at any food or possessions within reach
- have the right to defend any food or possessions they come upon
- expect to not be touched in any way they do not like
- expect to be able to demand various forms of attention or behaviors from you, their subordinate

The Solution

It is very important to establish house rules, boundaries, and limitations, and enforce them consistently, firmly and fairly.

This simple formula is all you need to maintain order and for you to have a stable, well balanced, and happy dog. When you provide these activities in this exact order, you will see a definite change in your dog's behavior.

1. Exercise

2. Discipline
3. Affection

Here are some simple exercises that will allow you to show your dog that humans are good leaders and that she has a responsibility to the family to serve and follow her leaders.

All of these **Relationship/Leadership Exercises** should be worked on simultaneously.

Feeding

1. Leaders Eat First
2. Earn Her Meal
3. Release Her to Eat
4. Sit-Stay or Wait for Meal
5. No Free Feeding

Sleeping

- Your dog should not be allowed to sleep on human beds or furniture.
- Your dog should sleep in a crate at night or during the day when you are not home.
- Your dog should accept being gently moved from any sleeping or resting place.

Limit Access to Movement Throughout the House

1. On-Leash Tour
2. Tether your pup
3. Increased Freedom
4. Boundary Training
5. No Touch or Leave it
6. Introduce Short Periods Off Leash
7. Increase Freedom as Earned

Playing

- Select appropriate play and chew toys for your dog.
 1. Acceptable Play Toys
 2. Non- Acceptable Play Toys
- Fixate your dog on appropriate play and chew toys
- Teach your dog to Fetch
- Teach your dog acceptable versus unacceptable ways to play

Positive Obedience, No Free Lunch Policy

- Ask your dog to perform simple obedience cues to get something she likes

- Don't only use obedience as a way to control your dog when they are either about to do something wrong or already have.
- Make your dog earn rewards and don't give them to her for free

Waiting at Doorways

- Your dog should always allow you to go through doorways first without crowding or bumping into you or your family.
- Teach her to "Sit-Stay" or "Wait" at doorways until you give her a release word
- Show her who is the leader in the household by going through doorways first

Petting and Attention

Ideally, a dog should never demand your attention or demand to be petted. These things should be earned rewards, not something that is due to your dog. **By not having the proper relationship with your dog you can create avoidance behavior and a frantic uncontrolled demand for your attention.**

- Correct demanding behavior by requiring your dog to "Sit", "Down", "Stay" before and during petting
- If she breaks from her position, the petting stops until she resumes the position.
- A good leader should expect his dog to be calm and obedient while she receives attention and affection.
- Be aware of when you are **reinforcing** your dog for the behaviors she offers, such as petting her when she is jumping, barking, growling, biting, and pulling on the leash when walking

The Duties of a Leader

1. Establish the rules, boundaries, and limitations
2. Enforce the rules consistently all the time
3. Maintain social order (leader of the pack chooses who is in the pack, and what authority each pack member does or does not have)

Specific Things That Show Dogs Who Is the Leader

This is a list of Relationship/Leadership Exercises that should be implemented when beginning any training program. These exercises outline specific privileges that a good leader would either expect or assume.

1. Leaders eat first
2. Leaders go through doorways first
3. Leaders stay calm, assertive, and in control at all times
4. Leaders set the pace and the direction (i.e., Heel)
5. Leaders do not let their personal space be invaded
6. Leaders say when play begins and when it ends
7. Leaders do not beg for attention

8. Leaders do not offer free treats
9. Leaders assume the higher ground (i.e., beds, couches, chairs, tables, etc...)
10. Leaders never change their direction or step over the dog
11. Leaders assign resting spots for other pack members

NOTE:

Be aware that as your dog's behavior improves you can slowly return her privileges. It isn't very often that you will have to completely maintain the strict code of behavior that is laid out in Relationship/Leadership Exercises. If you return only one or two privileges at a time, you can determine if that privilege causes your dog's behavior to regress.

Example:

If your dog reverts back to an unacceptable behavior because you let her sleep on the bed, then you would immediately remove that privilege. There are some dogs that can't handle privileges, such as sleeping on the bed, without causing them to behave badly. By only allowing privileges that don't affect your dog's good behavior, you can give your dog a great deal of freedom in her life while you are still being a good leader.