



PARKSIDE

CLIENT INFORMATION HANDOUT

DOMINANT DOGS

Dominant dogs are like some people, mostly pleasant but occasionally dis-agreeable. The most common cause of aggression by dogs towards their owners or family is that there is a contest for social status or dominance. Violent disputes may occur only occasionally, but the underlying cause is created steadily and subtly by a succession of seemingly innocuous incidents.

The dominance-subordination dimension is a collection of personality traits that have both inherited and acquired components. Chance, the breed and the strain of the dog determine the former, the acquired factors happen after birth. Examples of the latter are litter size and sex ratio, age at weaning, early training, personality of owner, later training, presence of other dogs, husbandry, illness, hormonal status.....to name but a few.

It can be quite a shock when a dog bites or even threatens the hand that feeds it. These unpleasant aspects of dominance can to some extent be controlled or diverted so that the more positive aspects of having an assertive pet are preserved.

If you own a dog that has bitten, you should certainly take detailed professional advice from a vet or qualified behaviourist. However, there are some definite DO'S and DON'TS to help owners achieve authority over their pushy dogs. None of the recommendation given below require violence or strength, better to employ brains rather than braun when impatience might provoke a bite.

Some or all of the following tips might help turn the tables on a dominant dog:

- Deprive the dog of accustomed rights and privileges. For instance, deny it access to key areas of the house such as the bedroom, or even upstairs. Never allow them onto the chairs, laps or bed as this brings it up to human level and height reinforces social rank.
- DO NOT allow the dog to solicit or demand services or affection of people. Thus, the pushy dog which presses against you or 'paddles' your knees with its forepaws should be ignored because IT is initiating an affectionate interaction. A few minutes later you can call the dog to COME/SIT then be stroked. Similarly, DO NOT allow the dog to determine time of access to the garden, food, walks etc.
- Ideally only stroke the dog or do anything pleasant with it after it has first complied with the SIT/DOWN commands. These postures can be initially trained for titbit rewards or during play outdoors, but in a more dominant context indoors.
- ALL commands must be strictly enforced, which means that only enforceable commands should be given in the first place. For instance, there is not point in shouting COME to a dog that is chasing a rabbit – wait until you have the dog's attention.
- Accustom the dog to being handled on the head – neck – shoulder region and lightly press down. The muzzle should be regularly grasped during greetings.
- DO NOT play games which the dog seems to 'WIN' – for instance, tug-of-war is a disaster because it implies that the dog is as strong as the human opponent. DO

NOT rough and tumble on the floor. Throw – Fetch games should be under PERSON control with the DROP/SIT (reward-praise).

- Regular obedience training should be conducted to some minimum level though not to competition/display standard. A useful sequence to train is SIT – STAY (walk away) COME – SIT (reward and praise). Increase the distance and duration of the STAY command. As a variant to SIT train, DOWN.
- DO NOT allow the dog to walk ahead of its handler, particularly through doorways, if the dog pulls on the lead, use a Halti rather than a choker.
- DO NOT allow the dog to eat human grade foodstuffs, either from begging handouts, scraps or palatable fresh meat.
- If your dog is male (7 out of 10 dominant dog problems occur in males rather than females)) there may be grounds for having it castrated. These grounds would be strengthened if the dog exhibits other androgen-dependant problem behaviours, for instance is excessively sexy, roams for bitches, frequently urine marks and fights male dogs (not bitches). A sensible preliminary to castration may be for the vet to administer an anti-androgenic hormone.

If some crisis has arisen which necessitates for confronting a dominant dog, be prepared – perhaps you have to administer ear drops, remove a thorn from a pad or extract bank notes from its teeth. Under these circumstances, change the context, go outdoors for instance. Fit a Halti so that you can control the head and stop biting. In extreme situations, fit a muzzle or have a shrill alarm handy to distract the dog.

Dominant dogs can be very rewarding companions because they retain a pride and presence which their more submissive and eager to please counter parts have lost. But, as in a marriage, a mismatch of dog and owner personalities can be disastrous. In these cases, divorce can sometimes be the best course of action for all concerned.

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