

Being Your Dog's Leader

How to Get Your Dog to Listen

Becoming a clear, consistent, and respected leader in your dog's life is key to producing a dog that is well mannered and listens to you.

But, as we discussed in the Debunking the Dominance Theory article, traditional forms of establishing dominance are not the way to true leadership.

A Leader, Not a Friend

Where people get into the most trouble is assuming that because their dog is their friend, it will listen to them. Wrong! Your dog can be your friend, but there have to be rules to the friendship.

The relationship between you and your dog is more like a parent/child relationship in that to be a good parent, you must provide safety, affection, boundaries, and value. A child must feel:

Like you love them which is shown through praise, affection, and respect.

Like they are safe because you always do what is in their best interest and protect them.

Like you value them and provide them with what is necessary for life.

Like they can understand what you expect of them through consistent boundaries.

These points are the same for a dog, and in order to create a dog that listens to you well, they must all be present in your relationship with a dog.

How to Mold the Best Dog

Mannered dogs are molded, not born. It requires a lot of patience, understanding, and training to create the best dog your dog can be.

Training should begin immediately! Don't wait until your dog is unruly, inattentive, and hyperactive. Puppies can begin learn the day you bring them home. All dogs should begin to learn the rules of the house from day one through consistent positive training.

Teach your dog that you will keep him safe (with no hitting, yelling, or punitive treatment); you will provide value and what he needs to live (food, water, treats, toys) and he will in exchange offer you something too.

We ask children to do chores around the house to earn their keep, and dogs are the same. In order to earn dinner, he can perhaps sit or lie down or stay. In order to receive toys, he

can give eye contact or sit. These are rules that are created in order for your dog to understand that you are a provider if he offers something in exchange.

Be consistent with rules! Just as it confuses a child when parents give different answers, it does for a dog too. Don't want the dog to jump on people? Don't allow anyone to provide attention for it. Don't want the dog to bite or mouth hands? Then don't allow anyone to play rough or with hands. Everyone must have the same rules for consistency.

Benevolent Leaders are the Most Respected

You don't need to be punitive to be respected, and don't listen to anyone that says otherwise. Instead, a leader that respects his dog and provides him with affection, boundaries, and items of value will be respected in turn.

A child that is punitively punished through means like spanking doesn't learn to respect his parent; he learns to fear him and work to avoid punishment.

Again, the same is true with dogs. Punishment means fear (and possibly nurturing of defensive aggression); whereas, positive, value/motivationally based training equals a dog with an understanding of expectations and respect of leadership.

If you've never owned a dog before or think you need assistance, a qualified trainer can always help you on the right path.