

## **Body language - A method of communication**

Evolution has provided the dog and his wolf ancestor with an elaborate social communication system. He uses sounds, smells and body positions to convey his message to other dogs and to you as well, if you learn how to read his signals.

### ***Rank within the pack***

All dogs are pack animals, at the core of pack life is a system of rank order - two dogs a male and female, take on a completely dominating or leadership role; all others become subordinate or followers of the leaders. In order to communicate status within the pack, animals rely heavily upon body signals. The family dog uses the same signals within the pack("human pack"). Your understanding of these signals is vital to successful puppy rearing, because this knowledge will allow you to help your puppy develop into a welcome and obedient family member, a follower instead of the leader.

### ***Early social development***

About the third week of age, normal, healthy pups begin interacting with each other, exhibiting "pushy" or dominant behavior. After repeated playful fighting, the pups learn when to act pushy and when to back down. Although capable of both behaviors, the pup's natural tendency is to go as far as possible within his social order - to push his way into a leadership position. It is this tendency you must control early if you want to raise a good family pet. Your puppy has been interacting with people from an early age and likes to be around them, he'll attempt to interact with people just as he would with a littermate. In such interaction or play, you and other family members should assume a leadership role and discourage pushy behavior in the pup.

### ***Is your dog a leader or follower?***

Learn your dog's body language now and begin to curb any signs of dominance at once. Following is a list of the dominant and subordinate (submissive) behavior signs to look for. They will help you understand what role in your family "pack" your pup is trying to assume.

### ***Dominate signals and behavior***

1. Nipping your skin or clothing or mouthing your hands.
2. Snarling and/or growling at people.
3. Guttural barking at people (as opposed to whining or howling).
4. Pilo erection (hair up on back).
5. Tail erect, elevated and slowly wagging while standing erect on all fours during meeting.
6. Curling the lips to expose teeth.
7. Mounting or thrusting of the pelvis (anywhere on your person).
8. Riding up on people.
9. Prolonged direct eye contact.
10. Resistance to removal of the food supply.
11. Resistance to the removal of possessed objects.
12. Stealing food in your presence.

13. Elimination within the home (marking) not occurring during housetraining the pup.

### ***Subordinate signals***

1. Ears back, head lowered, body lowered and tail down wagging vigorously during greeting. The mouth may be open and the lips drawn back in a "grin".
2. Lying on side while exposing groin region ears back, and tail tucked under body. Usually occurs during times of high social tension such as a discipline situation.
3. Licking hands or face.

The following guidelines are recommended to insure that you and your family members assume and retain the leadership relationship with your dog. Beginning at an early age will insure that your puppy will learn appropriate behavior quickly and will help eliminate behavior problems later.

1. Immediately discourage your pup's pushy behavior toward you or others. Use only enough unpleasant discipline to get the job done. Then follow up with plenty of praise.
2. Be consistent. Each and every time the pup displays one of the dominant or pushy signals, you or any other member of the family should follow through with discipline.
3. Don't encourage him to bark at people. Never roughhouse so he's won (or dominated you).
4. From time to time remove his food dish while he's eating and make him sit briefly before returning it.
5. Immediately discourage any barking, growling, or mouthing of hands or clothing. Make sure other family members can do the same.
6. Never discipline the puppy for misbehavior unless you catch him in the act. Use only enough discipline to make him immediately stop what he's doing, and praise him for stopping.

Raising your puppy to be a low ranking member of your household is a key in successful behavior training. In no way does this position "break his spirit" or inhibit his development into a normal, healthy dog. Remember that most pack members are subordinate. Rather, you are giving him a defined position in your family, behavior guidelines to follow and a sense of trust in you, his leader.