



The respected WA dog behaviour consultant helps us understand our canine companions



Does your dog rule the roost in your house?

A DOG left to run riot can quickly turn a happy household into madness and mayhem. Keeping your home harmonious comes down to helping your dog feel safe and secure – and that involves setting boundaries, without intimidation.

As you remove the stress of your pet having to make their own decisions about what is and isn't acceptable behaviour (which is your job), the shy or fearful dog can relax and the assertive dog (or control freak who may press your buttons) can also chill out and take a back seat.

Here are some tips to ensure members of your four and two-legged household cohabit happily.

*** Consistency counts** If there's anything that can lead to a downfall in your relationship with your dog, it's inconsistency. All household members need to be on the same page, so to speak, so that their dog only has one set of rules to follow. If each person has a different set of rules, things can get very confusing. In addition, the constant fluctuation in expectations creates instability. Whether or not your pooch seeks to literally be the "top dog" in the family is generally not

itself the problem. It's almost always the lack of consistency in the household.

*** Monitor your "love meter"** While affection is a wonderful aspect of the dog-owner relationship, if you're experiencing behavioural issues with your pet, monitoring your love meter is advisable.

This is because being overly affectionate without any structure can mean your dog may have no motivation to do as you say when you need them to.

If they can always get your attention and affection, what is the reward for behaving well? Although there will, of course, be occasions where it's acceptable to pat your dog when they approach to interact, the key is to not always cater to your dog's needs on their terms.

*** Know what your dog wants** What your dog wants and needs varies from one moment to the next (just like ours!) and understanding what they are can help keep things happy around the house. When you're asking them to behave in a particular way, consider what's motivating your dog at that very time and reward them with that. By "thinking dog" and interacting with your dog in this way, you'll be influencing and shaping their behaviour in a better direction. This is a smart way to communicate and you'll have them wondering how you're such a great mind reader.

*** Teach them manners** When your dog pushes into your personal space and pesters you for attention, consider that they may be

being rude and demanding, rather than cute. Your role is to teach them how to get what they want politely. This is done by rewarding your dog only after they've given up trying. This teaches your dog that patience, combined with good manners, will help them get what they're after.

So, when your dog is being pesky, play hard-to-get first, and then remain observant so that you can catch them doing something right. When you've spotted some positive behaviour, then reward them.

*** Timing is everything** When you tell your dog to sit or drop or request another behaviour, ensure your timing is such that there's a high probability of them following your instruction. When they're distracted and off with the fairies, you risk wasting a meaningful word at a time when it's not sinking in. Instead, wait until your dog has calmed down and is more likely to do what you're asking.

Addressing each of the areas above will improve your dog's attitude towards you and boost their respect for you and when that happens they will likely defer to you for instruction more often, meaning life around the home should be easier to manage.

Your dog relies on you to give them clear guidance throughout their life, so provide them with this structure and watch the fruits of your labour grow.

* www.kathydogtraining.com.au

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