

YOUR DOG

This information sheet is not intended to take the place of your instructor. Our intention is to give you some advice in understanding how your dog perceives its world with you while you are either waiting for your enrolled class or else as a supplement to same. If you have any more queries, please do not hesitate to contact the North Shore Dog Training Club Inc (ph: 413 8670).

INTRODUCTION

Mankind has been able to live with the dog for countless ages simply because their life style is similar to our own; ie, a family or "pack" structure. The most common misunderstanding dog owners seem to have about their pets is they feel and think a lot like we humans. We interpret their body language as being guilty, sad, happy, etc. However, sometimes these interpretations may be way off. For example, how many of us have said, "*Look, he knows what he's done, he's looking guilty*". Yet, what he is actually exhibiting is submission to you, knowing you are angry with him, but oblivious as to why. Therefore, it is extremely important to learn and understand your dog's body language.

YOUR PUP'S DEVELOPMENT

3 to 7 weeks: This is a crucial learning period in a dog's life. Personality and temperament are shaped by the experiences puppies have at this time. He learns the various behaviours that make him a dog - chase games, greeting behaviours, fight games, etc, are all necessary to shape the pup. For example, during play when a play fight may begin, the puppy learns that a submissive body posture has the effect of turning off the aggression of his littermate. During this critical period, the puppy learns to accept one of the most important lessons of his life - discipline. He learns this from his mother. She will correct him with a warning, maybe a growl which escalates to a snarl or a nip if the pup pushes his luck. Puppy then rolls on his back, giving a yelp, which will stop mother's discipline. This is all swift, to the point and over as quickly as it started. Puppies which are denied this interaction by being taken from the litter before 7 weeks may not realise their genetic potential as a dog.

7 to 12 weeks: 7 weeks of age is the ideal time for the puppy to leave the litter and come live in your home. Introduce the puppy in a positive non-threatening manner to those things that will play a role in his future life; eg, rides in the car, vacuum cleaner, traffic, children, men with beards, women in floppy hats, senior citizens, etc. While all these things are no big deal to us, to your puppy, they may be quite frightening if never before encountered. Tests show brain waves at this age are the same as an adult dog, however, concentration and attention span is short, but your puppy **can** learn. Not only can he learn, but he **will** learn whether you teach him or not. Now is a good time to teach your dog the manners which you expect him to have as an adult (eg, not jumping up, not mouthing, etc). **Do not allow him to do anything as a puppy that you do not want him doing as an adult.** During this period, any traumatic, painful or frightening experience will have a more lasting impact on your pup. Remember, it is the puppy's perception, not the owner's, that is important.

13 to 16 weeks: This can be the age when your puppy begins testing to see who is going to be the pack leader. Knowing who is the pack leader (ie, yourself and your family members) is important to your dog. If a person is not willing to (or unaware that they should) take on this role, then your dog will naturally do so. Training puppies at this age teaches owners to be the pack leader through specific exercises. Remember, it is not too early to start teaching your puppy manners.

4 to 8 months: This can be a time when your pup suddenly turns a deaf ear when called. He is testing his wings. This is probably when training clubs get a call from frantic owners. Careful, positive handling is needed at this stage. This age also corresponds with teething. While your pup may have his adult teeth, they are not yet settled so the urge to chew is very strong.

6 to 14 months: During this period, your adolescent dog may have a change of behaviour. He may suddenly be reluctant to approach something or someone familiar. Watch for signs of trying to change pack status.

1 to 4 years: Maturity differs greatly, depending on the breed of dog. Small dogs tend to mature earlier and the larger breeds later. This is often marked by an increase in aggression and a renewed test for leadership. If you are not going to breed from your dog/bitch, it is always a good idea to have him/her fixed. This will help with the unwanted puppy population and also help in a lot of unwanted behaviour (eg, straying, dominance, etc).

Please note the above is only a guide. Different breeds, and even individuals amongst the breeds, may show some, all or none of the above behaviour, but it is very important you are aware of the development of your pup in any case.

HOW YOUR DOG LEARNS

Dogs learn through pleasant and unpleasant experiences. They learn principally through memory. They are able to think and work out problems for themselves, however, in the context of what we try to teach them, we rely mainly on memory. The dog will try to avoid unpleasant experiences; those he sees as disadvantageous to himself and he will pursue pleasant experiences; those he perceives as advantageous. For example, when the fridge door opens and the dog appears as if from nowhere, he does so because he may get something to eat - advantageous. If your cat has had enough of your dog and gives him a good swipe, the dog learns to avoid the cat - disadvantageous. There are many influences on learning for the dog. These can be:

Breed Characteristics: Some dogs have been bred for particular traits (eg, border collie has strong herding instincts, will therefore love chasing cars, balls, nipping at heels, etc). The ease or difficulty of training can depend on the extent to which the exercise being taught is in harmony with his instincts. So-called stubbornness can be no more than a strong instinct which runs counter to what the owner wants the dog to do. The dog's temperament can also be influenced by the breed of the dog; some may be more independent rather than wishing to serve, so study into your dog's type is very important to understanding your pup's character.

Sensitivity: Sensitivity to touch, sight, sound, etc, also influences learning and response (eg, golden retrievers should have less touch sensitivity to cold water than a toy variety may).

Mental Sensitivity: Dogs are extremely tuned in to subtle body messages sent by you; they pick up when you are sad, angry, happy, etc. This will either help or hinder learning, depending on how aware you are of this fact.

Environment: When teaching a new lesson, try to do it in a safe and un-distracted environment, so your dog can concentrate on what is being shown rather than what is going on around him. Obviously, this is not practical at obedience class, but classes are there to show you how and then to practise at home. Once dog has learned that lesson, take lesson out into the world at large, so he knows he has to do what is required, even at the beach, park, at obedience classes or when visiting people.

Routine: Dogs are creatures of habit. Changes in routine can produce stress which retards learning.

Nutrition and Health: Food additives, chemicals and allergies could cause hypoactivity or lethargic behaviour. Always feed your dog high quality food and check with vet if you have any concerns.

The Handler/Owner: It is extremely important that when teaching a lesson, that you are consistent (a real toughie!). No "sometimes", "perhaps" or "hardly ever". If you ask a dog to sit, he must sit, even if you have to show him physically. Pretty soon, your dog will realise when you ask him to do something (or not to do something) he knows you mean it.

SOCIALISATION

A well adjusted dog begins with a well-socialised puppy. Some people think that socialising a pup means taking him to a family reunion, a noisy classroom full of 6 year olds and a park with 10 adult dogs - all in the same week. That's overload for most puppies and is not recommended. **Good socialisation** means gentle introduction to many people, places and other animals that will be a part of their life as soon as you pick up the dog/puppy (subject to immunisation, of course). If you have trouble imagining what kind of activities will help socialise your puppy, look over the following for suggestions. They are divided in to "Young Puppy" and "Older Dog" categories, since older dogs may handle more than canine infants. Use your common sense, as a shy dog may need to do "Young Puppy" activities and vice versa. Pace your socialisation efforts to suit your dog.

Young puppy suggestions:

- When pup first arrives in home, let him explore your house, room by room, under supervision, and after a toilet stop outside.
- Have the pup in your kitchen, doing normal noisy kitchen things; eg, washing pots, etc.
- Maybe do things while pup is eating; new noises that your pup hears while eating may be associated with the positive act of eating.
- Run the vacuum in another room at first. Let him just watch and listen at his own pace. If pup chooses to stay away, that's OK, let him take his time. Carry on with your business and your attitude that it's not a big deal will be picked up by pup and hopefully, curiosity will take over for him to investigate.
- Take him for a walk. If he is not yet immunised, carry him. Walk along your street, showing him birds, trees, cars, neighbours, etc.
- Children - if you don't have any, borrow some! Make sure they are not too excitable and are old enough to be told what you would like them to do. Have them sit or crouch and let pup approach them. No picking up of pup as he may wiggle and be dropped (not a good lesson for pup to learn about kids).
- Get visitors to play with your pup.
- Take a car ride. Make sure your pup has not just eaten as he may be sick. If he is too nervous, just let him sit in car at first, then turn on engine and let it run, then roll down drive and back and finally down the road and back. Each stage only done when pup is happy. It is best if pup is confined in the car (crate, barrier or dog seat belt) as then he can't distract you whilst driving.

Older Dog Suggestions:

- Take him for a walk on quiet roads at first, and then building up to busier roads and more people.
- Find or start a canine version of a play group (friends, relatives). Choose a fenced area where dogs can play naturally amongst themselves. Always supervise, watch

and learn how dogs interact with each other. However, watch out for any excessive "bullying".

- Take longer car rides. Stop, let the pup go toilet and walk on lead a bit. Always have water in car to give dog.
- Visit a training club. Observe a class and register for one. Your dog will probably be very excited being in a strange place with so many dogs around, but if you visit often, by the time you are actually in a class, he will be more settled.
- Walk him at parks and beaches using a long line for more freedom. If you keep changing direction, he will learn to wonder where you are going and keep an eye on you more.

As you socialise your dog/pup, you may find certain things frighten him. Most people instinctively soothe and calm the pup with words and pats. This is actually incorrect teaching. He will think you are praising him for being fearful. Instead, the best reaction is to say nothing, act casual and nonchalant. You want the pup to read from your body language that there is nothing to be afraid of. Again, common sense is needed. If the pup is truly terrified, it may help to avoid that situation until he is a little older (remember, a little, not until he is two years old!) and introduce him slowly to the situation, breaking it down into stages if you can. For example, if your dog has been frightened by a motor bike starting up, you wouldn't take him to a Hell's Angel Convention. Instead, say nothing, and just let him walk past (at a distance) a bike idling in the driveway at first and then slowly decrease distance.

Your life style and weekly schedule may make it difficult to find time to socialise your pup. **However, it cannot be emphasised enough now important this part of your dog's development is.**

PRAISE AND REPRIMAND TO TEACH MANNERS

Dogs learn through pleasant and unpleasant experiences associated with certain behaviour or actions. It is up to you to decide which of the two are required for certain behaviour. IT MUST BE REMEMBERED, that dogs learn faster with positive (praise and reward) training rather than negative. Consistency is the key here. For example, some people may not mind their dog jumping up at them in greeting, but will 80 year old nana (who is visiting) like that? If you allow your pup to jump up at you but not others, that will be very confusing for the dog. So if you do not want any jumping behaviour, then YOU must be consistent with the household rule.

Praise:

By far the best way to teach a dog:

1. Verbal "Good dog", delivered in a high and happy pitch.
2. Keep tiny but tasty tit bits in your pocket, given immediately correct behaviour is actioned by the dog.
3. Reward of being allowed to play with a particular toy (eg, a tug of war game with an old sock).

Generally, when both 1. and 2. are used together to start off with, you will only need to give 2. intermittently once the correct behaviour is learned.

ALWAYS praise for correct behaviour, even if it hadn't been asked for. For example, if your dog is returning to you of its own accord, still praise; if your dog sits without a command, still praise. If you know your dog is going to jump, put in a quick "sit" command and then praise, thereby "creating" a praise situation before a "reprimand" situation may have occurred.

Reprimand:

Must be given not later than 2 seconds after being caught in the act. Any later than that is a waste of time, as the dog will not associate the act with the reprimand. This may come in the form of:

1. A verbal glutteral "ut", "ug" or "nha", sounding very much like an adult dog growling a pup;
2. Sometimes ignoring an unwanted behaviour and "treating" a wanted behaviour is enough. For example, you arrive home, dog jumps up for a greeting. Totally ignore dog until it calms down or sits for you. Only then give it the attention he wants.

Should your dog display constant aggression towards children, adults or other animals, a referral to an animal behaviourist may be required, as this is often symptomatic of a deeper problem that may require professional advice. Ignoring this behaviour can result in a bite or serious attack, with obvious results therefrom.

DOG PROBLEMS

There are certain behaviours that our pet dog can exhibit that, to us, can be bad manners, downright annoying or even dangerous. For example, mouthing, digging, chewing, showing aggression, etc. However, it must be borne in mind, what we see as incorrect behaviour, is "*normal*" instinctive behaviour to our pet. Understanding this goes a long way to "*modify*" the behaviour so your pet can fit in with its human "*pack*". It must be remembered, dogs are not four legged humans but we, to them, are two legged dogs. It is up to us to understand why they do certain things and to correct the behaviour in a way that the dog understands.

Mouthing: The dogs mouth is the equivalent to our hands. It is used to explore the world, picking up things, tasting, catching, holding, etc, which is why puppies often "*mouthing*" people's hands – they are only (to them) returning what we are doing to them (ie, our hands are "*mouthing*" them). However, this is one dog behaviour that must be corrected, as what started out a being "*cute*" in a six week old pup quickly becomes a problem as he grows older with a full set of strong teeth. It is therefore important to reprimand right from the start this behaviour, using a verbal, plus pressing thumb in mouth, thus his mouthing becomes very uncomfortable to him and therefore, disadvantageous to have your hand in his mouth. Important, you must praise as soon as he stops, so he knows he's done right when he stops.

Excessive Hole Digging: This is a purely instinctive behaviour most pups go through. However, it can also be a sign of boredom in older dogs, or the need to bury bones. Many dogs will naturally grow out of this habit, but if they do not, you can put their own droppings in the freshly dug hole which will discourage them from digging there. This will not prevent them from digging a fresh hole, although it may help break the cycle. Give him distractions; eg, toys, plenty of exercise, regular training, etc, or restrict his freedom if you cannot keep an eye on him. It is useless reprimanding a dog from digging holes after the fact. He will not relate the reprimand to the deed, which may have occurred minutes or even hours ago. Reprimand may only be given whilst caught in the act itself.

Jumping: Again, your dog is purely following it's nature. In a wolf pack, members left at the den always greet the returning hunters (which is what we are to our dog). They do this by licking the adult dogs' mouths in greeting and for a feed. Just think, when you use your hands, we are returning the greeting. To modify this behaviour, verbal reprimand, followed by praise when the dog sits or stands quietly. Do not pat the dog until he has settled down. If possible, give a verbal command to sit just as he is about to jump and then praise when he has stopped himself. Another method is to totally ignore the dog when you first arrive, only giving him attention when he has calmed down; thereby your pet is not getting the return greeting it needs until it exhibits calm behaviour.

Chewing: Yet another quite natural and instinctive stage for pups. They must chew to develop their adult teeth. This is not an option. Therefore give them plenty of stuff they are allowed

to chew; eg, canon bones, chew toys, etc, and take out of reach objects he is not allowed (so you may have to change your habits of leaving your shoes on the front steps for a little while). Verbal reprimand only when caught in the act of chewing something out of bounds; eg, furniture. Otherwise, if you cannot keep an eye of the dog, restrict its freedom. If a dog does not grow out of chewing, that can be a sign of boredom or anxiety of being left alone. However, chewing canon bones, rawhides, etc, are important to keep the dog occupied and the teeth clean.

Aggression: Thousands of books have been written on this subject, as there are many causes of aggression; eg, fear, territorial, food protection, dominance, hereditary, ill health, etc. Perhaps the most common form would be a fear-related aggression through not socialising your dog properly from a young age with other dogs and people.

IT IS EXTREMELY important that all dogs are socialised, handled, meet and play with people and other dogs, in all environments to prevent this sort of aggression. It is never too late to socialise, but if you have an older dog, this should be done under strict control; eg, fenced area or on lead. Any sort of aggression toward yourself/other people/other animals should be reprimanded immediately.

Be watchful when your dog meets another dog. Realise that body signals and posturing is their first line of communication. Watch for these body signals to "judge" how they will meet. Get a book out of the library on your dog's body signals and what they mean. More often than not all they want to do is have a sniff and then pass on. It is often when the person on the end of the lead will pull back sharply and inadvertently "change" your dog's body language that trouble may happen.

It is up to you to work out what triggered off your dog's aggression and plan a course of action to correct it; for example, food growling - get the dog used to you handling its food; when he meets other dogs - socialise, go to obedience classes; when he meets strange people - get these people to give a tit bit and a kind word, allow the dog to approach them, not the other way around, if the dog is OK to pat, do not pet dog from top of head, but under chin, etc.

If your dog gets into a dog fight and there is another person there as well, you can break up the fight by grabbing their hind legs and "wheel-barrowing" them apart. If a dog loses it's balance, that would have serious consequences in the wild, so a "wheel-barrowing" will hopefully turn their attention away from the fight. Do not ever put your hand down to their heads to try and break up a fight – the chances of you being bitten would be extremely high.

If you see a strange dog approach your's with obvious intentions of aggressiveness, quite often by just shouting loudly at the other dog "*Get out of here*" will be enough to deter the other dog. Be careful, that your dog is on lead, otherwise, your dog may take your *cue* as leader to attack. Assess the situation, if you can just quietly walk out of any potential bad scene, do so.

TOILET TRAINING

Two ways of achieving this is:

1. **Crate Training:** When you can't watch your pup for signs of wanting to toilet (eg, sniffing and searching ground, straight after a meal, straight after waking up, after some hard play), then confine your dog to a crate or small area only big enough to hold the dog lying down and its bedding and water bowl. This will become the dog's "own" place and bed and he will try very hard not to mess its bed. It will then encourage the pup to "ask" to be let out by whining. You will then lead the pup outside to a specific spot, giving it encouragement to go (by giving a command, eg; "go quickly") and verbally praising him when he does, thus fostering a routine and putting a command to the act of toileting, something that will be very handy later on in life.

At first, you will have to go out 2 or 3 times a night but, as the pup gets older, this will naturally reduce.

2. **Spot Training:** This is to teach your pup to go in a specific area or on a specific surface; eg, newspaper. Again, learn to read when you pup needs to go, lead it to either a newspaper or outdoors to a specific spot. Encourage and repeatedly say "go quickly". Praise when he does. With a newspaper, after he has got the idea of searching out and going on the paper, gradually move the paper closer to the door and eventually outside.

Accidents will happen to start off with. Never punish your pup for accidents in the house because he will associate the punishment with the "act" of toileting, not the actual location, and will try and hide and start to get anxious about piddling at all. IT IS UP TO YOU to be observant and learn to know when pup needs to go.

ROLE REVERSAL

In the wild, dogs do not have equal billing within the pack. There is a clearly defined rank system which each dog knows his place in. If your dog is not told by the pack leader (hopefully yourself and your family) where it belongs, then it will try to be pack leader. Hence, you will get behaviour like dogs not wanting to get off the furniture, growling when you approach its food, refusing to go down, etc. If your dog shows any of these signs, then there are a few simple but extremely effective exercises you can implement to REVERSE YOUR ROLE within your dog's pack (family). There is no need for violent confrontations. The rank exercises subtly show your dog, in his language, that you are boss. Once he realises this, he will be much more easier to control in manners and training. He will not need to constantly prove his 'superiority' to you. The following are not placed in any particular order, because one is as important as the other. Neither is it that important that every rule is established; in most cases, by making a specific effort on just a few, the dog changes its viewpoint about its role within your household. These rules can be laid down one at a time and, in this way, confrontation is avoided. It may take two or three days to establish the first rule that you decide upon, for example pushing through doorways, but you should persevere until this is well and truly understood before moving on to the next stage. As each rule is understood by the dog, the next becomes easier to establish.

Role Reversal Exercises

1. Make sure that you are the one who goes first through doorways and narrow openings. The simplest way of achieving this is to close all doors in the house for a few days so that the dog's freedom of movement becomes dependent upon the doors that you choose to allow him through. Don't tell him to stay, sit, or wait - this is basically asking him if he minds if you go first. Ideally, he should grant you the right of rank by allowing you to precede him. If he tried to barge in front of you, slam the door shut - be careful not to trap his nose. Initially, you may have to repeat this procedure four or five times at each door, but he will quickly get the message that when you open a door, he steps backwards.
2. Make sure that he does not occupy your beds or chairs. You, however, should be able to occupy the areas where your dog generally chooses to sleep. Besides his bed, there will be many other places around the house and you should spend a day or so mapping these out - you will be surprised how many there are. Deny him access to some and make a point of occupying the others.
3. Do not allow him to occupy key areas in the house. Busy doorways, main entrances, top steps are all areas that would be controlled by the Alpha (highest ranking) figure. Making these areas inaccessible is the easiest solution, and although physical barriers might get in your way for a few days, it will be worth it in the long run.

4. Make sure that when you want to go from A to B you do so by the shortest route - in other words, make the dog move out of your way, even if he appears to be asleep. Making him wear a light trailing house line attached to his collar so that you can gently pull him to one side makes the point very clear that lower ranks step aside for higher ranks.
5. Make certain rooms in the house off-limits altogether, especially your bedroom. Your dog should learn that although you have access to the whole of the den, he is only allowed in part of it.
6. Do not allow him to demand attention. Dogs learn to do this in a variety of ways; nudging your arm for a stroke, pretending they need to go into the garden, especially when you are on the phone etc. All privileges should be earned first, even if it is only complying with a command to sit. All his attempts to initiate some sort of interaction between you should be put onto your terms.
7. Having earned the privilege of being stroked, you should only stroke him on his head, neck and shoulders. These are the dominant regions of the dog and careful observation in the park of two high-ranking dogs will show you that the most dominant will place his chin or a paw on the back and withers of the other dog.
8. Remove all his toys and possessions. Select one of these and keep it under your control. He should only be allowed to play with this toy when you want him to and even then he should earn it first by obeying a command of some sort. Do not allow him to keep it afterwards, take it off him again until you want him to play with it again.
9. Make sure you eat before he does. Either change his meal times to follow yours, or mix up his food in his presence and then make a point of sitting down and eating a biscuit. By going through the act of eating first, you are stating to your dog that at feeding time, the highest ranking eats first and therefore gets the richest pickings.
10. Only allow him five minutes to eat his food. Dominant dogs have a habit of leaving some or all of their food for long periods of time, almost as a visual display of their rank - this is my food and I know that no one else will eat it. Even if he starts to eat it after 4½ minutes, it should be taken up after five.
11. Make sure that he greets you first thing in the morning and not the other way round. It is the lower ranks that approach the higher ranks to greet them.
12. Increasing your control through regular obedience sessions, even if they only last five or ten minutes a day, will help tremendously. These sessions should be done on a lead and collar so that you are in the position of being able to insist that the dog obeys.

Remember, that not all of these exercises will be required, but if you have a problem with a particular behaviour, you can pick out the one that will help; ie, If your dog growls when you approach its food/bone - exercise 9 and 10 should reverse this behaviour; If your dog growls when you want him off the chairs or beds - exercises 2, 3, 4 and 5 will be needed, etc. Don't expect instant results. The trick with dog obedience and manners training is consistency and patience. If your dog gets away with a particular behaviour one time and doesn't the next, it will be ten times harder for him to learn the required lesson.

Last but not least, learn about your dog through books from the library, your breeder, your local obedience club and just plain observing him and you will soon find that he and your family will be inseparable.