

HANDLING AND LEADERSHIP

Dogs are pack animals by nature. Every pack has a leader, known as the alpha animal, which dominates and leads the other members of the pack. The alpha is the boss and makes decisions for the entire pack. All the other members of the pack form a hierarchy of dominance and submission where everyone has a place.

In your home, you and your family become your dog's pack. It is in your best interest to establish yourself in the alpha position. Being the pack leader does not mean you have to be big and aggressive. Nor does it mean there has to be a battle of wills in which you are the victor. Anyone can be the pack leader. It is an attitude or an air of authority. It is the basis for mutual respect and provides the building block of communication between the two of you.

So how do you become the pack leader? In the wild, the adults of the pack begin early to teach the pups the rules. The adults grab pups around the head or neck and gently, but firmly, pin them to the ground. The pups learn to greet the adults in a submissive posture out of respect for their position as leader.

Handling Exercises

These exercises can help your dog learn to submit to handling and other tasks such as grooming, nail clipping, ear cleaning, and medicating. These exercises can be done 3-4 times a day until the pup gets used to them and relaxes. Continue exercises weekly after that for several months.

For small puppies up to 3 months

1. Sit on the floor; pick up your pup with both hands supporting him just behind his front legs, facing you. Hold him away from you at arm's length. Look into his eyes. Growl or say no if he struggles. Hold him until he relaxes. Vary the time (15-45 seconds) you hold him and location.



2. Cradle your pup, placing one hand under his head and the other supporting his back so that he is upside down on his back, and up in the air. Hold a larger puppy across your lap. Hold the pup for 15-45 seconds, using the same growl or no as in exercise 1 if he struggles. Hold him until he relaxes.

For larger dogs

3. Straddle your pup, with one of our legs on each side of him. You should be facing the same direction as your dog. Lock your fingers together under his chest, just behind the front legs. Lift his front legs off the ground for 15-45 seconds, using the same growl or no. Hold him until he relaxes.

4. Place your dog on the floor with all four legs pointing away from you. Hold him firmly by the neck with one hand, and press down on his midsection with the other hand. Talk to him softly after he is quiet. It might take 2 to 3 minutes to get him to relax. If he exposes his belly to be rubbed, you are on the right track. Do not allow him to struggle, get up or nip. Always praise him in a quiet tone when he is still and quiet. Now is a good time to handle all four paws and look briefly into his mouth so he can get used to tolerating your handling.

All Ages

5. Having the dog sit or down before you give him anything he wants from petting to tossing a toy is a great way to remind him that you are the leader and to get in great training.