

# ***Dealing with Dominance***

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Animals, who live in social groups, including domestic dogs and wolves, establish a social structure called a dominance hierarchy within their group. This hierarchy serves to maintain order, reduce conflict and promote cooperation among group members. A position within the dominance hierarchy is established by each member of the group, based on the outcomes of interactions between themselves and the other pack members. The more dominant animals can control access to valued items such as food, den sites and mates. For domestic dogs, valued items might be food, toys, sleeping or resting places, as well as attention from their owner.

In order for your home to be a safe and happy place for pets and people, it is best that the humans in the household assume the highest positions in the dominance hierarchy. Most dogs assume a neutral or submissive role toward people, but some dogs challenge their owner's dominance. A dominant dog may stare, bark, growl, snap or even bite when you give him a command or ask him to give up a toy, treat or resting place. Sometimes even hugging, petting or grooming can be interpreted as gestures of dominance and, therefore, provoke a growl or snap. A dominant dog may still be very affectionate and may even solicit petting and attention from you. With only minor dominant dogs, you may not even notice subtle behaviors your dog may be inflicting on you or your family.

The following may be signs of dominance – you must look at them within their context. Take a step back and assess the individual situation. Ask yourself is my dog telling me to do something? Is he thinking he is in control or the boss? Watch his body language!

## ***Possible Early Signs of Dominance***

If your dog is exhibiting any of these behaviors, they could, but not always, be a sign of early dominance. You must be able to put them into perspective.

- Constantly jumps up on you.
- Refuses to end its barking, whimpering, and even barks back at you.
- Listens to you only for treats. This means, you are not worth listening to.
- Play bites at your hands or feet. Ignoring you and time outs seems to not work anymore.
- Tries to mouth you when you catch him by the collar after misbehaving.
- Growls at you or others. Any type of growling is a sign.
- Pushing you around, bumps into you, forces its way through doorways, and knocks you around. “Get out of my way!”
- Pulls on leash, barks, and even snaps on walks especially when faced with: strange joggers, cars, cats etc.
- Sits on your foot, leans on you, goes between your legs, and rests its paws on you as if is a command. Bullying you.
- Demand attention and rarely stops when you tell it to? These dogs jump up on you whether you are in the mood, sleeping, tired, holding a cup of coffee, and simply is saying Now, Yes-Now!
- Hates to lie down, or lies down for a second but pops back up. Or, instead of lying down, he'll offer shake or give a paw. Down command is the command of respect.
- While playing games, such as fetch, he refuses to bring back the item directly to you, as if “it's mine, and I'll give it up when I'm ready.”

### ***Tell Tale Signs of Dominance***

- Not breaking eye contact, growling or snipping/biting if human doesn't look away.
- Controls the use of space in the household, may growl or bite when trying to remove them from furniture or bed, block doorways, certain areas of the house (aggressing against anyone who tries to pass).
- Shows signs of aggression when being petted – top of head or back (threat gestures).
- Resist obeying commands that he knows well – stare, bark, growl, snap or even bite when given a command, asked to give up a toy, treat or resting place.
- Nudges your hand, takes your arm in his mouth or insists on being petted or played with (in other words, ordering you to obey him).
- Defends his food bowl, toys or other objects from you.
- Won't let anyone give him medication or handle him.
- He gets up on furniture without permission and won't get down.

### ***What to Do if you Recognize Signs of Dominance***

Speak to your trainer immediately. A private counseling session may be in need if aggressive behavior is involved. Do not take your dominant dogs behaviors lightly; stop them now before they escalate.