



How to Be Your Dog's Best Friend

Dogs, regardless of breed, are all descended from a wolf ancestor. The wolf pack is a well-organized society; a hierarchy of individuals who live and work together for the benefit of all, much as humans do. All members of such a society must obey rules for the common good. Pups are born with certain drives or energy which direct them toward the top, middle or bottom of their group as they mature and take their place in the pack. They also develop an intricate form of communication by reading body language. The key to understanding dog behavior lies in the nature of the pack. The pack is safety, food, companionship, survival and to be apart from the pack is the worst thing imaginable.

Dogs do not speak English. We teach them a little of our verbal language, but rarely do we use our body language deliberately to "speak" the dog's language; but they read it expertly. When you come home and your favorite shoes are chewed, your body language says "I'm very angry". So, your dog assumes a submissive posture and you think they feel guilty. They don't know what they did wrong (eating the shoe happened hours ago), but they do know to get a way from your hostile energy. When your dog growls and snaps because they don't want their nails trimmed, and you say "It's okay, good dog" and then pat them, they hear "It's okay to growl at people"; you're rewarding their aggression.

When we bring a new puppy to live with us, they naturally want to follow the hierarchy of pack order with the humans being the top of the pack and any other pets being next. Dogs do not dwell on whether they are first or last, they simply want to know who the leader is and follow that energy. If you do not provide strong leadership, then the dog starts making decisions and assumes the pack leader role. If a pup's own energy is strong, they will assert dominance and become aggressive; if it is weak, they will become fearfully aggressive. Either way, you have an unstable and unhappy pack.

Dogs do not think about the past and they do not worry about the future, they live in the present. They react to the now and you need to deal with them in the now. Cesar Millan, *The Dog Whisperer* has a few mantras for pack leaders (that's you) to follow.

1. The leader leads through a calm, assertive manner. You think and then act, calmly but decisively. The dog follows by being calm, submissive. They obey.
2. Don't give affection, attention, food, etc. to an excited dog. If you give them everything they demand of you, your dog perceives that as weakness and you will have a spoiled rotten dog.
3. Exercise to blow off that pent up energy, discipline to achieve calm submission, then affection to reward the behavior. Exercise is aerobic – running, fetching, jogging, playing with other dogs. This releases physical energy. Discipline is walking with your dog; you walk, the dog follows. You're walking together and this releases mental energy. Then you reward a calm, relaxed state of mind.

So, being your pup's best friend is simple: Be a calm, assertive pack leader. Give them a job to do, which is following your leadership. Reward them with attention, praise, games and walks. You'll achieve a stable, peaceful and happy household.