

'Say Please!'

Humans and dogs are social animals and get along well when everyone understands the rules of living together. Since we humans are the ones with the big brains who have invited dogs into our households, it is our responsibility to help our dogs learn how to navigate politely in our human household. In this program, all your dog must do is respond to your cue for a behavior as a way of saying, "please" in order to get access to the good things in life.

This is a simple yet powerful practice. It allows your dog to have some say in her life. For a "pushy" dog, saying please teaches them self control and acceptance of your guidance. For shy dogs, it increases self-confidence and trust in you to respond and cooperate. When you and the dog understand how to get what you want from each other in a mutually respectful way, stress is reduced and a peaceful relationship can form.

Just like adult humans have to work for a living, in this program your dog must earn everything she wants by responding to your cue to perform a behavior - which could be just a simple sit or down - before you give her what she wants. (To be fair, you must teach the dog how to perform those say please behaviors on cue before asking for them.)

Once they know some say please behaviors, ask for a behavior before:

- Putting food bowl on floor at mealtimes
- Giving treats and chew toys
- Stroking, scratching or petting
- Being allowed to go outside or allowed indoors
- Having a leash and collar put on
- Going to the car, getting in the car, getting out of the car
- Being 'invited' onto the bed or couch (if owner so desires)
- Greeting visitors
- Playtime with you or with other dogs

Introduce a 'no reward' mark before consequences. A 'no-reward mark' is not a command. It's a signal that lets your dog know he's chosen the wrong option and the human is now going to leave the area or withdraw attention or take away a privilege. Pick one word or phrase to use when your dog fails to respond to your cue. Possibilities: "too bad", "wrong", "uh-oh".

Freedom is to be earned. Example: You ask your dog to sit before opening the back door for her. If she sits, you can praise and open the door. If your dog doesn't sit, she has just lost the privilege to run loose in the back yard at this time. You could give your 'no-reward' mark, turn your back and step away from the door for 30-60 seconds, then return and give your cue for the sit and only open the door if she does. Or you could put your dog on leash and walk her into your back yard to pee rather than giving her freedom to sniff and play and pee at her leisure. Either way, her freedom is limited until she earns it by responding to you.

Avoid confrontation. If your dog is aggressive toward you or toward other people or household pets, removing or avoiding the triggers of confrontation is vital for the success of this program. Avoiding confrontation does not mean your dog is 'winning' over you. It means you, the big brained

human, are controlling the environment to help the dog form new patterns of behavior and mutual trust. If your dog is continually put into situations in which she feels the need to defend herself or her possessions, defensive aggression becomes a habit that's hard to break.

If your dog guards 'high value' items - particular toys, treats, rawhides or bones - from any member of the household, remove those items from the dog's access for the time being. If your dog guards places, like chairs or beds, do not allow the dog access to these high places. After your dog is good at saying please, you will be able to work more productively at solving resource guarding (a great tool for that project is Jean Donaldson's book: *Mine! A Practical Guide to Resource Guarding in Dogs*) and other aggression issues.

Have specific feeding times. A household leader is who sets the rules for behavior and controls valued resources. If your dog has food in his bowl all the time, he's in control of a very valuable resource. Your dog should be offered food at your convenience, only when he says "please".

Example: If you ask your dog to sit for his dinner and he doesn't, give him a 'no-reward mark', put the bowl away and walk away for 5 minutes. Return and give the dog another chance to respond to a cue for sit - if he does, give him his meal. If he doesn't, you can again give a no reward mark and put the food away for another short delay.

Ignore impolite demands. Example: If your dog climbs into your lap uninvited, puts her paws on you, or pushes you with her nose, she is not saying please politely! If this happens, simply give your no-reward mark, stand up to 'slough' the dog off you, then ask for a sit. If the dog sits, you can pet him as reward, if you choose.

If your dog barks at you for attention, give your 'no-reward mark' and turn and walk away *every time* - giving in now and then to demand barking will make the behavior harder and harder to extinguish. Look for opportunities to give attention your dog when he is calm and quiet!

Once your dog understands the process, she may well begin offering her polite behaviors to you when asking for attention or privileges. Pay attention, praise politeness, and respond to those polite requests at your convenience..

Set limits without yelling, hitting or leash corrections. A trustworthy family leader is calm and confident. Remember that there is a big difference between fear and respect. Fear creates distance, respect reinforces bonding. Maintain a clear set of expectations and boundaries for your dog, teach them the means to earn their rewards and your relationship and communication will grow.

Do not take your dog's behavior personally. If you feel yourself getting frustrated, give yourself a time out! Put your dog away in her crate or safe dog-proof room with a fun chew toy and walk away for a while. Once you've regained your cool, think about what happened, plan new responses, consider ways to control the environment, teach new behaviors and make changes for the better.