

## **Who's the Boss? It Should be You!**

Isn't it cute when a puppy brings you his toy to play with, or nudges your knees for a pet? Don't you find it hard to resist rewarding your puppy with a cuddle when he pounces on your lap?

If you answer "yes" to these questions, you are doing your puppy a disservice by teaching him to be "Leader of the Pack," and this can lead to problems down the road.

"A pack can only have one leader," says Barbara Jolliff, professional trainer for Best Friends in Carmel, Indiana, "and in the dog world you're either the leader or the follower."

### **The Alpha**

All dogs are born with a "pack instinct" that helps them determine where they stand in the family or group. When a dog enters your home, he expects to follow rules and obey the leader, who he should recognize as you. It is imperative that your puppy learn his rank within your family's pack immediately. Dogs that know their place in the social hierarchy are generally content to maintain that position, and are more comfortable and secure.

The degree of self-confidence your dog possesses will guide your behavior, Jolliff says. "If you've got a timid little bichon, you've got to let him win a few games," she explains. "But if you've got a German Shepherd who's regularly challenging you, he's got to know his place."

### **Be a leader**

There are several subtle ways to teach a puppy its place in the pack:

- oMake him move -- establish territory control. Don't walk around your dog if he's lying in your path - nudge him out of the way and force him to move for you. Similarly, don't allow your pet to go through doors before you.
- oNo access to furniture unless invited - this is your territory. Being allowed on your bed or couch is a privilege that must be earned (by being well-behaved and housetrained, of course).
- oYou eat first - in the wild, the pack leader always eats before the rest of the pack. Enjoy your meals, then feed your dog.
- oNo free rides - the puppy needs to learn that everything in his world is controlled by you, and anything he receives must be earned - including your affection and attention. Ask him to perform simple commands such as sitting before eating, and enforcing the "down-stay" while you clip on his leash.

### **Socialization**

Exposing your pet to as many people and situations as possible will reinforce his place among humans. Teach him to sit while you're greeting people, and praise him for friendliness. Teach your puppy right from the start how to behave around children, and let him know that he is below them in the hierarchy.

If a dog's place in his pack is not determined from the outset, he may eventually challenge you for the leadership position. He can be manipulative, demanding and

possibly aggressive. It is difficult to alter this behavior once the pup is grown, so asserting your place as the "alpha dog" while the pup is young is advantageous. It's also easier to put a pushy puppy in his place than a full-grown adult dog.

"Just like humans, all dogs need limits and have to follow rules," Jolliff says, "and one of the keys to a good relationship is respect." Set boundaries, be firm, and offer rewards, including love and kindness. You'll find you'll both be happier.