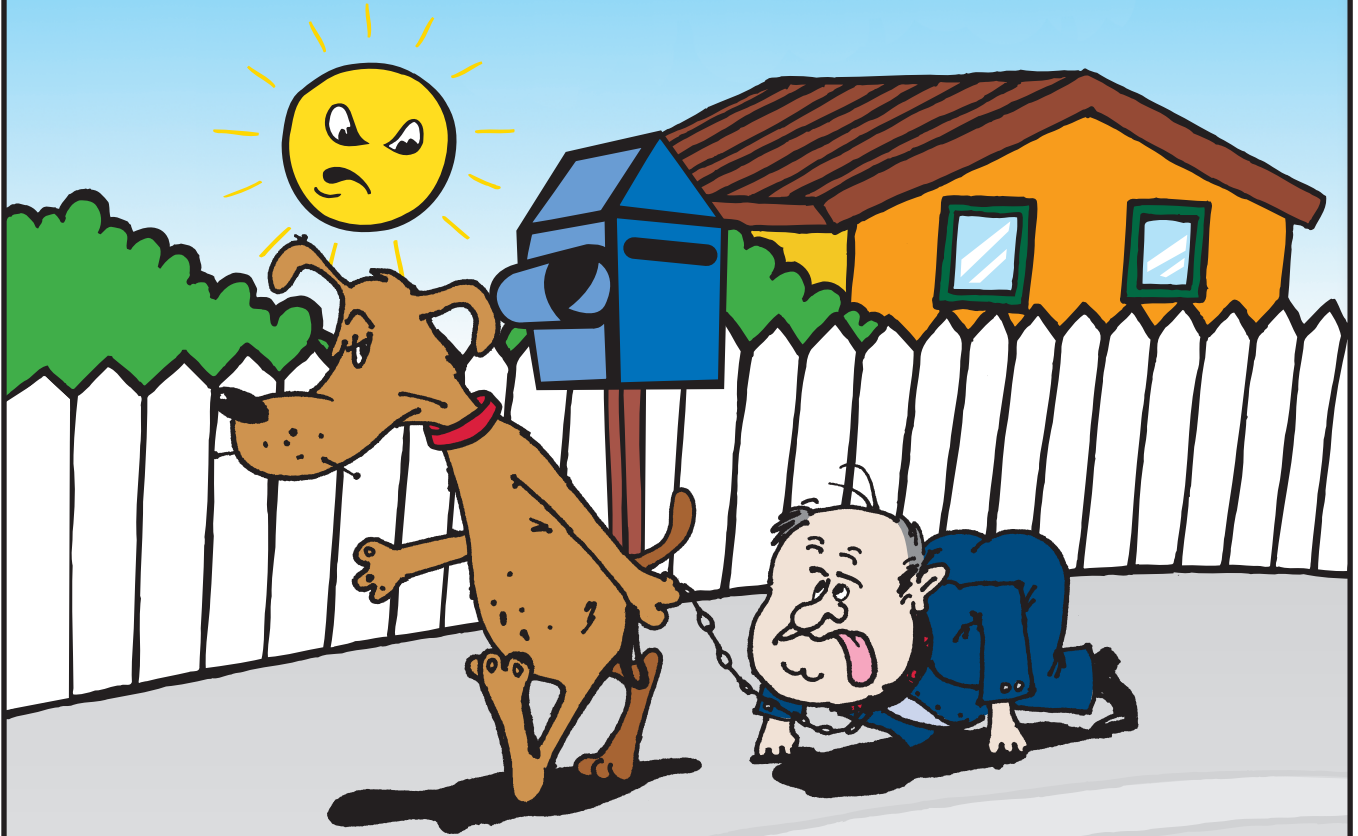


# Dominant Behaviour



Also known as "rank order", usually shown to members of its pack (family) and is used to show the chain of command.

Dogs are social animals guided by a leader, and most dogs are happy to follow a leader. However, if you do not establish your leadership over the dog, it will establish leadership over you. Dominance is usually an aggressive reinforcement of **"who is in charge"**.

## **Dominance is usually recognised by the following actions:**

- Biting members of the family.
- Growling when its food dish is approached.
- Growling when touched, hugged or patted (especially around the shoulder area).
- Mouthing or abbreviated biting.

- Responding aggressively to a stare.
- Responding aggressively to being told off.
- Mounting family members.
- Responding aggressively to being disturbed whilst sleeping.
- Sitting in entrance ways.
- Demanding attention.
- Claiming items of furniture as its own.
- Scent marking in the house.
- Excessive sniffing investigation of members of the family.
- Ignoring known commands.
- Pushing / leaning.
- Jumping up.

## Suggested treatment methods:

### 1 You must firstly understand the dynamics of the aggression so that you have a good perspective of the problem.

Dominance is about "who is in charge" or "who calls the shots". The dog may display aggression towards anyone in the pack simply to keep them in order. In many cases the dog may also display aggression towards intruders to protect the pack.

### 2 Punishment is not recommended.

Using discipline against a dog that fancies itself as "the boss" may be hazardous to your health. Discipline may also cause the dog to redirect its aggression.

### 3 Training and extinction.

Teach and reward submissive behaviour and ignore dominant behaviour. If your dog does something wrong, remain calm. If you lose your temper or yell at your dog you may be sending a message that you are not in control.

### 4 Behaviour modification.

Rules and well defined boundaries create stability. Stick to the rules and be consistent. From time to time the dog will test the boundaries to see if it can get away with just that little bit more. Don't be alarmed, this is normal behaviour. By testing the boundaries the dog is establishing its limits.

### 5 Diet.

Always check the dog's diet. There may be a reaction to certain preservatives or the energy intake may exceed the energy output.

### 6 Leadership.

#### Suggested rules:

Some of the following suggestions may serve no other purpose than to demonstrate to the dog who is the leader. If your dog is displaying advanced signs of dominance it may be appropriate to consult a suitably qualified person. It is recommended that the following suggestions be carried out in order to minimise the chance of a retaliation.

- After periods of separation, pay the dog no attention for 5-10 minutes. You will decide when it is time to greet because you are the leader. You want to send the message to the dog that the separation was no big deal. You also do not want to reinforce any anxiety the dog felt because you were away.
- Avoid eye contact during that time. As soon as you make eye contact you are in communication.
- No pats when the dog seeks attention from you. Pat the dog on your terms not when it nudges you and demands attention.

- If the dog continues to demand attention from you put it outside for 10 minutes. Jumping up or nudging you is bad manners and there should be a consequence for showing bad manners.

- No treats or tidbits during this retraining period.

- No promoting bite games (tug-of-war). This type of behaviour encourages and reinforces dominance and promotes the use of teeth. Try to promote mind games that don't use the teeth. A dog's mind needs exercising as much as its body.

- Don't give the dog toys to destroy. Again, this type of behaviour encourages and reinforces dominance. Every time the dog kills a toy it gets a sense of power and seeks bigger and more challenging toys for the next bout.

- If you play and exercise your dog with toys, do not permit the dog to keep the toy at the end of the game. You should control when playtime is, what the rules are and when the game is over.

- When entering or exiting doorways, don't let the dog go through in front of you. You are the leader and therefore should enter or exit first. (Tip: Tie some knots in the dog's lead and shut the door on the lead if the dog tries to go through first. The knots will stop the lead sliding through. Leave the dog there for 15 minutes before starting again.)

- No sitting or sleeping in hallways or doorways. A dog in this position may have the perception of being in control over who comes or goes.

- Ensure that the dog stays out of the kitchen at cooking time. This is a good rule to have permanently for safety reasons i.e. hot pots, etc.

- Make the dog sit and stay when visitors arrive. A dominant dog may feel that it is his job to check out any intruders.

- If the dog is in your path, make it move rather than you walking around it.

- No sleeping on the bed or in the bedroom. This may reduce the dog's perception of equality.

- No sitting on the furniture.

- Once you have taught the dog to stay off the furniture, send it outside occasionally for no reason (just because you said so.)

- After feeding, remove the food bowl. You control the resources.

It should be noted that these rules are established to resolve dominance. If your dog sleeps in your bedroom and there are no behaviour problems as a result, then there is no need to change.