

PROTOCOL FOR DEFERENCE, BASIC PROGRAM

Dogs' social systems are very similar to those of humans. They live in extended family groups; they have extensive and extended parental care. They work as a group or family to help care for the offspring. They nurse their young before feeding them semisolid, then solid food. They use play as one form of developing social skills. They communicate extensively vocally and non-vocally; and, most important, they have a social system that is based on deference to others. Fights for status or control are notoriously rare among wild canines, such as wolves. Except in what humans perceive to be abnormal social conditions, most human social relations are structured by negotiation and deference to other rather than by violence. Deference is the respectful submission or yielding to someone with superiority. The individual to whom others defer to may differ depending on the social circumstances. Status and circumstances are not absolute. In the human situation, a child may defer to his parents' requests but then be the leader on the playground to whom other children defer. Dogs are similar.

Much has been written about dogs viewing their human families as their packs. Although the pack comparison is not exact, dogs are social and generally look to their people for guidance. Dogs often become problems when they cease to look to their owners for guidance. This program is the first step in both preventing such problems and in treating all forms of behavioral problems. All social animals create some form of hierarchal structure. This structure allows them to communicate with each other. Because dogs are so similar to humans in so many ways and so frequently appear to be attentive to every word, it is assumed that they are complying with humans being the top of the hierarchy. Puppies actually need guidance in how to do this, and problem dogs need to have consistent, benign, kind structure explicitly spelled out for them. This is a kind of benign doggie boot camp. If the dog knows a consistent rule or behavior that will get the attention of his people, the dog will then be receptive to guidance. This is a form of discipline. People often confuse discipline with violence or abuse. The following program should be executed without violence or physical abuse. Abused dogs or those consistently mismanaged with physical punishment either learn to override the punishment or learn to seek it because it may be their most common or only contact.

The intent of this program is to set a baseline of good behavior interaction between the owner and pet to teach the dog that it must consistently defer to people to receive attention. This is done in a safe, kind, passive manner and is more difficult than people frequently acknowledge. The reason is as follows; if the owners are talking, reading or watching television and the dog comes up to them and rubs, paws or leans against them, the owner usually passively reach out and touch/pet the dog. The dog controlled that entire interaction. Score: dog – 1, human – 0 and the people do not even know that they were conveying any signals other than affection to the dog.

Under no circumstances can the clients touch, love or otherwise interact with the dog unless the dog defers and awaits their attention. This is done by having the dog sit. The sitting does not need to be prolonged, only 5 to 15 seconds. Very young puppies may not do it perfectly because they are wiggle worms. Regardless, pups as young as 5 weeks of age can learn to sit and attend to the owner (look at them for cues, make eye contact, look happy and attentive while being quiet) in exchange for a food treat. As soon as the puppy sits, the person should say "Good girl/boy!" and give a tiny treat of something special. Also praise and pet the pup. For a dog that already knows how to sit, the only problem is going to be to reinforce this for everything that the dog wants. The rules: the dog must sit and be quiet to earn ANYTHING and EVERYTHING it was for the rest of its life. This includes sitting for the following:

- Food and feeding
- Treats
- Love
- Grooming

Being able to go in and outdoors
Having the leash, halter or harness put on
Having the paws toweled
Being invited onto the bed or sofa (if the owner chooses to allow this)
Playing games
Playing with toys
Having a tick removed
Having a wound checked
Being petted or loved
Attention
Anything the dog wants!

All the dog must do is put its bottom on the floor, be quiet, look at the owner, and await the owner's cue. This takes only seconds, but its value is unmeasurable. All dogs should learn this and no dog is too old to learn this. If the dog is older or arthritic, it might be more comfortable lying down. All puppies should be raised with this simple but powerful deference behavior. This will not take away a dog's spunk, fire or individuality. It will allow the owner to have a far better relationship with the dog and to control the dog. The latter can be critical if the dog puts itself in a potentially injurious position.

If the owner has a very pushy or energetic dog, the owner may find that constantly monitoring and correcting the dog's behavior is exhausting. If this happens, the owner will become angry with the dog and will not practice the behavior modification correctly, and the owner will eventually be worn down by the dog. The dog can then learn to hone its obnoxious behaviors. In these cases, a better option may be to banish and ignore the pet, unless the dog is trying to actively work with the owner. This is not the same as the withdrawal of affection recommended by many training manuals. Withdrawal of affection will make anxious dogs more anxious and will make the owner feel sad, angry or guilty. Such circumstance will worsen, not improve the situation. However by giving themselves permission not to have to monitor the dog at every moment, owners can then better comply with this protocol and the protocol for relaxation. In fact, unless the clients are absolutely willing to exhibit the extensive degree of vigilance recommended here, it is preferable to banish the dog to a place where it can be ignored but not neglected. Such places should be dry and comfortable, protected from the elements, safe and somewhat amusing for the dog. Amusement or stimulation can be provided by toys, balls, marrow bones or Kong toys filled with peanut butter. Caution is urged in using food with any dog with any food associated aggressions. Owners must be able to retrieve the dog and then induce it to practice these protocols without the dog lashing out to "protect" its food. If the owner chooses the actively banish or ignore the dog as a part of the method for enforcing the protocol for deference, they must be willing to establish and maintain regularly scheduled periods of interaction in which the deference protocol is always enforced. This will take a minimum of 20 minutes twice daily. Several (8 to 129) 10 to 15 minute sessions per day are preferred when banishment is used. Remember, any time the dog is with the owner, the protocol for deference must be enforced. This means no attention for the dog unless the dog is quietly sitting.

What does such a protocol do to treat or prevent problem behaviors?

1. Sitting and deferring for everything the dog wants, forever, reinforces the innate social structure of the dog and teaches it to look to its people for cues about the appropriateness of its behavior.
2. Deference behaviors can act as a form of "time out". They give the dog respite from a situation so that the situation and behavior does not get worse. The dog can learn that if it responds to a person's request to sit, the person will help it decide what the next best behavior is. This is a great relief to dogs that are anxious about appropriate responses (i.e. many dogs with behavioral problems).

3. Deference behaviors allow the dog to calm down. A sitting dog is less reactive than one that is running around. Thus these behaviors allow the dog to couple a verbal cue, a behavior and a physiological response to that behavior. This has a calming effect.
4. Deference behaviors, consistently reinforced, allow the dog to anticipate what is expected and to be able to earn attention.

Points to Remember

1. Starting immediately, the dog must earn everything that it wants for the rest of its life. The dog does this by quietly sitting and staying for a few months deferring to you.
2. The dog is requested to sit by using its name and the saying "Sit". This can be repeated every 3 to 5 seconds as needed. (This is not an obedience class exercise.)
3. If the dog resists or refuses to comply, walk away from the dog. The dog will eventually follow. When the dog appears or demands attention, ask it to sit as described above. If the dog resists, walk away from the dog. Sooner or later, the dog will cooperate. You just have to be patient.
4. As soon as the dog sits, reward it with praise. A food reward will hasten the process for a dog that does not know how to sit. The next step is to teach the dog "stay". (This is described on the next page.) Remember that the dog must stay until you release him from the command. Because the point of this protocol is to enforce deference that is generalizable, quick releases are desired as opposed to testing the dog by making him stay for extended periods of time. Later you can practice long stay and downs as part of an overall relaxation and behavior modification program.
5. Watch for subtle, pushy, defiant behaviors that the dog may exhibit. Expect to occasionally make misstates and be frustrated. Do not fight with the rest of the family about it or get overly worked up. This will not help the dog. Remember that dogs read body language far better than you do and that they are watching for their opportunity to respond to your behavior. Use that watchful behavior and shape it into deference behaviors.
6. Remember that everyone in the household must be consistent and work with the dog. Children need to be monitored to ensure their safety and to help them not teach the dog the wrong behavior. Children must understand the difference between a food salary and a bribe and must be taught not to tease the dog. Dangling food in front of a dog at a distance is an invitation to get up and lunge. Everyone must return to the dog to reward it, tell it to stay and quickly couple verbal praise with the food treat. The food treat should magically appear on an unfolded, flat hand as you are praising the dog.
7. Reward the dog. This should be fun for everyone.

Teaching Sit

Consider using food reward/salary, particularly if the dog must reshape undesirable behaviors. Many humans have a tremendous resistance to food rewards for dogs. The charitable explanation for this is that they do not understand that a food reward is not a bribe, but rather a salary. It is important to understand the difference and avoid bribes.

A bribe comes before the desired behavior as a lure to distract or compete with the dog so that it does not commit a behavior that the person is otherwise unable to control. This is a sad but common situation in which owners find themselves. A reward or salary comes after the fact in exchange for a behavior perfectly executed in response to a request from the owner. This means that the dog is attending to the owner's desires awaiting their intentions, deferring to their needs, and responding appropriately. The appropriate response earns the dog a reward.

Owners are generally receptive to these differences and quickly realize not only that they have been bribing their dogs, but also that they have not felt too good about themselves for doing so. A reward structures set the standard for compassionate but disciplined control.

Food rewards may be necessary to teach and enforce deference behaviors to dogs that already know how to sit. They can be very useful in teaching puppies to sit that do not already know how to do so. Puppies are babies and have a short attention span. Food helps them focus.

If the food treat is held on one person's hands between two fingers and that hand is first placed in front of the pup's nose and then raised up and back, the pup's head will begin to move to follow it. Gradually the pup will sit because it is easier and more comfortable to do so. The person moving the treat should say "Sit" (2 to 3 second pause), "sit" (2 to 3 second pause) and so on while moving the treat until the puppy sits. As soon as the puppy accidentally sits, say "Good dog!" and instantly give the treat. The pup will be reinforced in the appropriate time if the treat and praise are given as soon as the puppy sits. This must be repeated until the pup sits flawlessly and without hesitation. This generally takes less than 20 minutes for a pup that has not yet developed bad or inattentive behaviors.

Is it necessary to push on the puppy's bottom to make it sit? No, and given how big people are and how small puppies can be, it might be unwise to do this. It is especially discouraged in dogs that might be predisposed to later hip problems. There are three other choices:

1. The person can gently put a hand behind the puppy's bottom so that the dog backs up and bumps into the person's hand. The person can then gently shape the puppy to sit and reward the puppy immediately.
2. You can have another person stand behind the pup with their feet near the pup's haunches. As the pup backs up, the person's feet and legs will shape/guide the puppy's body into the sit position.
3. A Gentle Leader head collar can be used to help the owner quickly teach the pup to sit.

Teaching Stay

"Stay" can be more difficult to teach than "sit" because the tendency is to rush the dog and proceed at a pace more suitable for the person rather than for the dog. This response is rooted partly in the person's feelings that if the dog does not comply instantly, the dog is stupid and the person is in error. This is not true so everyone can stop feeling guilty. There is much variation in dogs' abilities to relax and stay, and owners are often unwittingly give inconsistent signs with their body language. Among the most common of the inconsistent signals is talking to the dog over one's shoulder and telling it to stay while going away from the dog. Dogs that do not know "stay" will not learn it by this approach and will be distressed.

Before the dog can learn to stay, it first must know how to sit. If the dog is physically more comfortable laying down, that is fine. This is not an obedience class, no points will be awarded and no trophies given. The point is to start a less reactive posture that is standing and lying down is less reacting than sitting. Some dogs are calmer lying down, so it is preferable for them.

Next, tell the dog to sit, verbally praise it when it does sit, say "stay" and take a microscopic step backward. Repeat "stay", go back to the dog, repeat "stay", and reward. A sample sequence proceeds as follows: "Bonnie sit. Good Girl". Give a treat. "Stay. Good Girl." Take a step backward while saying "Stay" and then stop. "Stay Bonnie. Good girl." Return to Bonnie while saying "Stay" and then stop. Say "Bonnie, good girl" while giving a treat. Then say "Okay" to release Bonnie from the command and she can get up.

Note the Following:

1. Use the dog's name. This will get it to attend to you. You can use it frequently, unlike with obedience, provided it attends to you. In fact, the name should be the cue to orient toward you. If the dog does not look at you immediately, put the treat near your eye. The dog needs focus. You can couple the treat next to your eye with the vocal signal "Look".

2. Repeat the commands. This is not like in obedience training; the dog needs your reassurance. As the dog improves or learns more, repeat the commands less frequently and at greater intervals. This is what physiologists call “sharpening” behavior.
3. Reward the dog appropriately. Eventually the food treats will appear less predictably. In the beginning, the dog needs everything possible to help it to learn.
4. Remember to use one or two words consistently as a releaser and remember that if you use those words while talking to the dog, the dog will get up. If the dog gets up before being released, make it sit and stay again, and wait 3 to 5 seconds before you release the dog. This prevents jack-in-the-box behavior.
5. As the dog becomes more experience and masters staying at a short distance, gradually increase the distance between you and the dog. Do not go from getting the dog to stay within 1 meter of you to walking across the room. The temptation will be great and you will only have provoked conflict and anxiety in the dog, which defeats your goal.