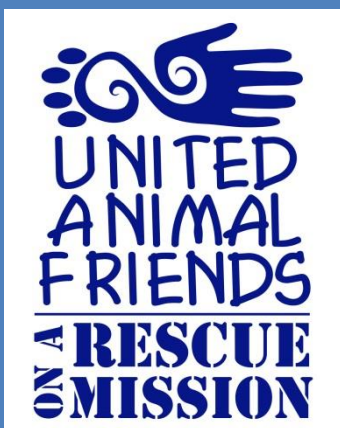


How Dogs Think

Knowing how a dog thinks is very helpful when training your dog to be a courteous member of your family. Dogs want to give love and to be loved, and will do most anything to please their families and earn praise and affection.



Like the wolves they are descended from, dogs are very social pack animals and need to be part of a group. You, or your family, become that group or “pack.” Put simply, if you’re not going to make your dog a member of your family, then don’t get one. A dog that is left to live his or her life alone outside is a deprived, neglected and very unbalanced animal. Similar to a two-year-old child, the dog will act out frustration - in the dog’s case, by barking, digging, chewing or some other destructive behavior.

Every pack has a leader, or “alpha” animal. You must be that leader. Dogs think along the lines of a pecking order and have no concept of equality. When they display aggression or ignore your commands, they are challenging your leadership and attempting to be the leader. Don’t let them.

This is where obedience comes in. Whether you adopt a puppy or a ten-year-old dog, start in right away with positive reinforcement to establish yourself and your family members (including children) as benevolent leaders and the higher-ups in the pack. Basic obedience training will help you establish this crucial hierarchy.

Packs also have their own territory and they will defend it. It is the alpha’s job to take on this responsibility. Let your dog know that you are handling this so he doesn’t think it is up to him to take care of it. You don’t want your dog trying to defend your home from every visitor, so tell him everything is OK. Give the command to sit or down and stay while you answer the door. The same goes for anything that arises while you are outside the home. Let your dog know you are handling it with a calm, assertive posture and place the dog in a subordinate role to your lead.

Dogs also obtain a wealth of information from your body language. Try to see yourself through their eyes. They need a leader who is confident, so pay attention to your posture and body movements, and be clear about what you are asking for.

- When you ask for a behavior, don’t keep repeating the request until the dog complies. This only

teaches the dog to count - he will think you only want him to sit after you have asked him five times.

- When you give your dog a treat, don't hold it over his head, as that only encourages him to jump for it. Hold the treat to your chest and ask for the desired behavior. The second the dog responds with the behavior, quickly move the treat to a spot just under his chin so he can take it without reaching.
- When calling your dog to you, don't lean toward him or step toward him, which is dog language for "go away." Instead, turn your body slightly and start to take a few steps away as if you are going to do the most fun thing ever and you are inviting your dog to join you. When he starts to follow, lavish him with praise. Make it fun and rewarding for your dog.
- Always praise your dog for coming when you call, even if he takes a frustrating amount of time to do so. If you express your frustration to him when he finally comes, you are sending a negative message and the next time he may not want to come at all. Always make it a positive experience when the dog comes to you and the next time he will be quicker about it in order to receive your praise.

Remember that when you make training a positive experience for your dog, you will earn his respect and create a strong bond. Being the alpha does not mean belittling the dog. Be a benevolent leader. Be clear in your requests and always reward good behavior. It doesn't always need to be a treat - a dog who respects you as its leader just wants to please you, and your love and affection is their greatest reward.