

Texas Veterinary Behavior Services

Lore I. Haug, DVM

2627 Cordes Dr.

Sugar Land, TX 77479

281-980-3737

sykevet@aol.com

Polite, Attentive and Calm Exercise (PACE)

Relationships are crucial for social species. Over thousands of years, social species such as dogs and humans have been biologically programmed to maintain contact with other individuals of their kind. This is partly a matter of survival – in groups these species can more effectively ward off predators and capture large food sources. (This strong drive for social contact is one reason that separation related problems are so common in dogs.) Dogs are somewhat unique in that the process of domestication has enabled them to substitute humans for other dogs. In fact, dogs will often preferentially choose to be with humans rather than with other dogs.

It is important that you remember that dogs are NOT people, no matter how similar their behavior may sometimes seem. Dogs also are NOT wolves. While they are genetically similar and many of their behaviors are similar, they are distinct species. Attempting to apply rules of human or wolf social behavior directly to dogs is unwise and detrimental to your relationship with your dog. In free-ranging or “wild” states, dogs have different social groupings than wolves do.

Relationships, as you know, are not perfect and require “work” to keep them healthy. All relationships contain some level of conflict. The health of a relationship is essentially based on the balance between social attraction and social repulsion – essentially the things that draw two individuals emotionally (and spatially) closer to each other and the things that drive them apart. Good relationships are based on trust, consistency, and fairness; healthy *emotional* relationships cannot exist without trust. This means your dog must *learn* to trust that your behavior will be consistent and fair. (Learning to trust can take some time so this is another reason to have patience with your dog and even with your friends and family.) Your dog should see you as a source of comfort and safety. Your dog should also recognize that you are in control of many valuable resources that are of benefit to the dog (e.g. food, water, shelter, toys, etc.). This helps to increase the dog’s social attraction to you. If we are to use an analogous human relationship as an example, the most accurate one would be parent and child. Your dog needs predictable and fair rules by which to live. (If your dog’s behavior seems unpredictable to you, imagine how unpredictable your behavior seems to your dog!) Your dog also needs you to teach him these rules because he was not born knowing what they are, especially those that are unique to human society.

Many information sources will tell you that in order to raise a well-behaved dog, you must “show the dog who is boss” or exert your dominance over your dog. This approach is simplistic and often dangerous. It has resulted in many well-meaning owners (and even trainers) being bitten. It has also further eroded many a dog’s trust in humans. Discipline is important, but it must be fair and consistent; *it should never be emotionally or physically abusive*. Good parents do not punish a child’s every single tiny infraction. You choose your battles so the balance between pushing the dog away emotionally (which a punishment will do) and maintaining the dog’s social attraction (i.e. “affection”) to you stays in favor of the latter.

The protocol outlined here is essentially a new rule structure for living with your dog. It is in place 24 hours a day – every moment that you are around your dog. This exercise is an extremely important part of the program for the dog and all family members should participate. It is designed to establish consistent interactions between you and your dog. This makes your

behavior more predictable for the dog, which will lessen the dog's anxiety and confusion. This allows us to set up a social structure for your dog so that he knows exactly what is expected of him in any given interaction with you. The goals with this program include the following:

- a. To condition your dog to watch you and look to you for direction in how he should behave in any situation. Your dog should "ask permission" before engaging in certain behaviors or activities.
- b. To help you learn to manipulate your dog's reward systems. Dogs are rewarded by many things besides just treats and petting. Going out the back door can be a reward and you should learn to use all these "life rewards" to your advantage.
- c. To condition you to be aware of how to maintain control over your interactions with your dog. You will learn to have your dog react to your behavior rather than you reacting to your dog's behavior.
- d. To teach your dog self-control and "emotional maturity." Because we often treat our dogs like emotionally stunted children, our dogs frequently behave that way. This program will help you develop your dog's emotional response and control to a level appropriate for your dog's age.

The following steps are important aspects of implementing this program. The process is easy in theory, but sometimes difficult to do because it must be implemented in every interaction you have with your dog: any time you give the dog something, any time you let the dog have something, or any time you let the dog do something it wants to do. Examples of such interactions include, but are not limited to:

- Greeting the dog when you come home
- Opening any door for the dog (front door, back door, car door, crate door, etc.)
- Giving the dog ANY type of resource: toys, treats, food bowl, new dog bed, etc.
- Putting on the dog's collar
- Clipping the leash to the collar
- Starting a training session
- Playing with the dog
- Allowing the dog to go forward to greet a person or dog
- Allowing the dog to sniff something off the trail on a walk

This is not an all-inclusive list. This protocol is executed every day, all day long – essentially any time you are around your dog. Just as you can never stop being a parent, you cannot at any time abdicate your role as your dog's teacher and mentor. When you are around your dog, you are training the dog whether you realize it or not. You want to make these interactions meaningful. The more time you spend shaping your dog's behavior during the course of your day, the more effective your lessons will be. If you only spend time training your dog 20 minutes twice a day, then you will end up with a dog that is well behaved for only 20 minutes twice a day.

During all of your interactions with your dog, you are establishing a bargain with the dog. You will follow through with your end of the bargain only if the dog meets his end of the bargain. For every interaction, the dog must meet four behavioral criteria:

1. Your dog must **respond to any requested cue** behavior (e.g. sit) within an established time frame. Initially this time frame will be 3 seconds. (As your dog gets better at this, you will shorten the time to 2 seconds and eventually to 1 second.) You will give the command and silently count to 3. If the dog does not respond, repeat the command once and give the dog another 3 seconds to respond. If the dog still does not respond, abort the interaction. You can either walk away or give the dog a tiny time-out by withdrawing your attention from the dog for several seconds. (Look away, keep your hands away from the dog and ignore the dog completely during this time-out.)

2. Your dog must **remain calm** during the *entire interaction*. This means the dog is quiet (no whining, barking, or growling) and the dog's feet are motionless on the ground – no prancing or squirming.
3. Your dog must **remain focused on YOU** during the interaction. This means the dog should make eye contact and look at you rather than focusing on what you are about to give the dog or let the dog do.
4. Your dog must remain **outside the designated “personal space” around you**. The size of your personal space will vary with the size of your dog. Essentially the dog must remain far enough away from your body that he cannot make physical contact with you or interfere with your movements with any part of his body. For large dogs this is typically 2-3 feet and for very small dogs it may be only 12 inches. It will never be smaller than 12 inches, no matter how small your dog is. This is easiest to measure with respect to where your dog's feet are in relation to the closest part of your body. The personal space rule applies whether you are standing, sitting or lying down. This keeps the dog from crowding you (e.g. to get through a doorway) and also reduces nuisance behaviors such as jumping and mouthing. The dog is only allowed inside your personal space by specific invitation when he is otherwise behaving appropriately.

The criteria for focus and calmness are by far the most important of the four. If you cannot be successful in getting all four criteria at the beginning of your program, pick two that your dog is most likely to do successfully and start with those. The next week, add one or both of the remaining two criteria into the interactions.

In all situations, if your dog fails to maintain an established criterion throughout the interaction, you should abort the interaction. Just stop what you are doing and go back to standing in a calm, neutral manner. If the dog stood up, direct your dog to sit again and wait for the dog to calm down and focus on you. Once this happens, tell the dog “good” and begin the interaction again. Use your voice to tell the dog what you want him to do and to praise him when he does it correctly. Do not verbally or physically punish your dog in any way if the dog makes a mistake. Your actions will do that – and in a much more effective manner. The dog is trying to learn just as you are, but you have the advantage of knowing what the goal is. The dog does NOT know what you want and so you must be patient while you teach it to him.

The more excitable your dog is, the more rigidly you must adhere to this protocol. In some circumstances, if the dog is very calm and attentive to you, you can relax one or more of these criteria, but NEVER relax any of them if the dog is excitable or out of control. (Remember this exercise is a lot about teaching your dog self-control.)

In addition to the above, you should refrain from letting the dog persistently lean or press against you when he is interacting with you or resting near you. This is particularly important if your dog is aggressive to you or if your dog has a separation-related disorder. If the dog attempts to do this, use body blocks to quietly move him away from you (see Body Blocking handout) or send him away from you (e.g. to his bed). Remember that your dog should only invade your personal space if you specifically invite him to do so. If you wish to have the dog sit in your lap or lie next to you, he must be polite before the invitation is given. In most instances, you will be asked to limit the duration of time that the dog is allowed to sit in your lap or otherwise be inside your personal space. This usually will be for 15 minutes or less at any one time, but it will vary with your dog's temperament and the problems you are having.

Discourage attention-seeking behavior. Remember that even brief or fleeting eye contact will reward your dog for pestering you, as will any other direct reaction such as verbally or physically reprimanding the dog. Ignore the dog or walk away if the dog attempts to solicit attention from you. You may also body block the dog out of your space, but don't look directly at the dog when you do this. Wait until your dog is behaving in a more relaxed, polite manner and then make a *point* to pay attention to him at those times. For example, if the dog goes to another part of the

room and lies down calmly or begins to chew on a toy, make a point to praise or reward the dog in some way after a few seconds or minutes. If the dog gets up to approach you, ignore the dog again. "Good boy" means you like what the dog was doing at that time and you want him to continue doing it. "Good dog" does not mean, "come here and pester me."

For some dogs, the stringency of this protocol can be relaxed once the dog's behavior has improved to an acceptable point. However, for other dogs, these rules must be in place for the life of the dog. In some cases, your dog will tell you into which camp he falls. Many clients begin to relax these rules after a few months only to find that their dog then begins to relapse. Your dog's behavior is always changing in response to his environment, so any changes you make in the environment can change the dog's behavior again.

While this protocol may seem restrictive, the point is not to force you to interact with your dog less or spend less time with your dog. The goal of this rule structure is to change the way that you interact with your dog and when you interact with the dog, so that you can shape more acceptable behavior and help your dog reach his full potential as a member of your family.