

**For the sake of our sanity and for the safety of our dogs
mold them into their best “self”**

Puppies instinctively know how to be puppies in a litter. They instinctively spar with their litter mates, jockeying for position within the litter. They are born with an aggressive instinct mandatory for their individual survival. This is Nature’s way - “survival of the fittest”. The strongest and most aggressive canine pups will survive thereby passing on the “strong, smart, dominate future leader ” gene for lineage improvement.

In a people pack filled with humans and other “pets”, this behavior isn’t acceptable as there is no climbing the ladder. Although the canine has the capability to become a valued partner...The canine in a people pack is lower on the ladder than any human people pack member and always will be.

Nonetheless, dogs don’t instinctually understand our rules or our hierarchy. In canine packs, instinct dictates they be resourceful and driven scavengers. In people packs we call them garbage divers and counter surfers....a “problem dog”.

So...the big question is....how to instill “human” rules from birth and counteract THEIR instinctive behaviors in order to avoid undesirable behavior within OUR people pack environment as they age. The answer is to develop a set of rules within the pups new pack. These rules are unmovable, unrelenting, non-wavering, consistent....and so on.

These governing interaction/pack rules are just the way life is. These are just a few of my hard cast rules within my household.

- no aggression
- no playful biting, mouthing
- quiet time is inside; play time is outside
- go to bed when told
- stay out of designated areas
- No garbage diving
- No counter surfing
- No chewing on anything other than their designated chews/toys
- No toileting in the house
- No jumping on family or guests
- No charging the door when visitors arrive
- sit for attention
- Calmness for maintenance, i.e. toe nails, teeth ears, baths, etc
- no DEMANDING attention through pawing at family/guests
- Sit for collar placement
- manners!

My basic list of household rules, like any other household, is progressive and keeps including more and more criteria. When you set and maintain the rules, the rules become “just a way of life”, just like being raised within a canine pack. The rules are what you tell them....because you are the elder in the pack and hold all the authority of molding your pack to your desired level(s).

Developing a Communication System

In order to teach the rules you need to be able to communicate acceptable and unacceptable behavior, good choices vs bad decisions. The primary problem is that you don't speak canine, and canines don't understand the human language. In order to communicate in a language they can understand, we must first use the language they DO instinctively understand.

It's much easier for humans to learn canine language than it is for the canine to learn people language. Much of their canine communication is with a reward/discipline system....or rather positive reinforcement and/or negative reinforcement....but all is completed through body language.

BODY LANGUAGE/POSTURING.....you scream. It's just a puppy. How dare we use body language on a pup or a new canine people pack member? Before you get your panties in a bunch over my use of body language/posturing, you first need to understand what I mean when talking about body language/posturing.

Body posturing, for those that don't understand its importance is perceived to be as horrible as the term ALPHA. Both are viewed as bad things. The unknowing consider body posturing or being the Alpha only as abuse, aggression, intimidation.... basically all negative things. This way of thinking is so far from the truth. Body posturing can be intimidating, or it can reflect playfulness. It can demand results, or invite pleasure. It can reflect calmness or boldness. It can reflect fear or protection. Body posturing is nothing more than the ability to communicate in a universal language all animals understand, human or not. Alpha....this one cracks me up. Alpha isn't a negative thing it's a TITLE, just like “head of household”, leader of the pack, lead mare in a herd, President of the United States. Alphas responsibility isn't only to enforce the rules/laws, it's to lead to water, find shelter, find food, protect from danger, ensure the “family” survival, etc. Being groomed by the alpha is the greatest privilege/reward. It's a huge responsibility to be the alpha in ANY herd, pack, pod, home, country, etc.

Pack Communication

In the canine pack, their reward system relates to being groomed or entertained by an elder. This is positive reinforcement for acceptable behavior. When the pup is calm, they are rewarded with being groomed, or being allowed to just hang with the elder. If that behavior turns into biting, jumping all over their elders, etc, the elders will give a warning to quit that specific behavior (pack rules, molding behavior)....this is initially done with a sincere growl. If the pup continues with the unacceptable behavior, the elder will increase their facial expressions and firm up their stance (body language/posturing) to a serious mode to include a

snarl and baring teeth. If the pup continues, the elder will show extreme body language/posturing by standing over the top of the pup, head cocked, bared teeth, and a pretty impressive growl. The pups response will be submission by cowering and/or showing its belly. Eventually the juvenile learns how to interact with fellow pack members using the manners their elders taught them.

Although canine submission is desirable for individual survival, in the people pack, we do not want to create a cowering, belly showing, piddling on the floor puppy. We want to raise a confident, obedient member of our pack without breaking their spirit.

In the human pack, we also have the same communication system, but not to the degree of canines. We first give a warning to our child, then a reinforced “that’s enough” escalated warning, and a final warning or punishment. It’s sort of like a child asking a parent for something....the parent says “no”. The child repeats the request, and a firmer “NO” is received as the elder strengthens their stance. If the child continues the repeated request, the adult will usually yell “I SAID NO!” Either the child submits to this authority or continues by throwing a tantrum and she/he is sent for a time out or ? In a wild pack or herd, a “time out” is called “casting out”, a very well understood activity and a very effective way of getting your point across.

Nature has given us a communication ability that all creatures understand. You cannot give the final “I SAID NO” without the related body posturing of shoulders back, head held at an angle, torpedo guided eye contact or possibly a firm stance with a forward motion. Nature has also included a universal communication tool for warnings.....a stomped foot. The stomped foot is used by cattle, deer, dogs, humans, elephants, moose, horses, and every other critter I have witnessed to include a beaver slapping its tail on the water (its form of a stomped foot). It is universal language either stating a warning to intruders to keep their distance, a way of stating they have had enough, or a temper tantrum. The stomped foot is a very powerful communication tool. If you’ve ever seen a toddler do it....you know it’s a universal language that the youngest to the oldest understand. Juveniles in any mammal environment may mimic this communication but elders have (and must use) the authority to override this tantrum or refusal from the juvenile/pup. **If the elder ignores this tantrum/refusal, this puts the juvenile on a higher rung on the hierarchy ladder and behavioral problems will soon start to develop.**

My “Acceptable and Unacceptable” communication language.

With the exception of “sit for attention”, one of the first set of verbal behavioral cues I teach my pups are understanding the difference between acceptable and unacceptable behavior. This system will be used throughout their life with a very clear understanding on their part.

My approval and disapproval communication is very simple. For every correct choice, correct activity, correct attempt (no matter how slight), they are given a “good” verbal cue. The “good” cue is given without treats and is used continuously every time I see my canine member complete a good choice no matter how small or simple. The “good” acknowledgement is said

in a soft, no energy, happy facial expression, and a warm comforting voice. The absolute moment they make a good choice, the “good” is given. “good” is also given while being calmly petted. When they sit next to me with a calm disposition, I stroke (pet/or massage) them and use the same “good” response. I am rewarding them for being calm. Their calmness is a “good” choice. Eventually, every time they hear the word “good”, they not only know they made the correct choice, but also associate the word with warm and fuzzy feelings. NOTE: “good” is NOT the same as “good girl” or “good boy”.

The disapproval communication is a three to four phase process, depending on the age of the pup/dog, and the extent determined by their ability to cope with your disapproval. When I see the pup/dog doing something they shouldn't be doing, I will give them an “AAAAAAA” verbal warning. It's the same one we humans received by our parents when we were about to do something we shouldn't. That extended grunt instinctually means that we better think twice about whichever activity we are about to do. The absolute moment they stop the unacceptable activity, an immediate “good” is given to reward the correct choice to stop. IF they continue with the unacceptable activity, the “AAAAAAA” is increased in intensity to include the 2nd level body language....head cocked to the side, shoulders drawn back, and an intimidating glare. If they push you past this...the final level has been reached. A stomped foot to get their attention and a very firm “BAD” is given with hurricane force behind it in order to relay our authority and communication that this IS NOT the correct choice. Again...the absolute moment they quit the unacceptable activity, a soft and rewarding “good” is given. Going back and forth between “Bad” and “good” body posturing/language/verbiage can transpire in split seconds.

Using the “good” and “AAAAAA” for minute by minute activity, you can control (and teach) your pup/dog how to make good choices AND communicate/teach them your expectations for its pack membership, responsibilities AND control behavioral issues.

As your puppy gets to about 6 months old, they will start to test your authority. Coffee, my first GSP, openly challenge me and one day she tipped over the garbage to find out whether or not the punishment was worth the reward (of garbage diving). I gave her my best “BAD” response I could and she decided the garbage was worth the verbal punishment. Not to be bested by my dog, I put her e-collar on her and set her up for the opportunity. I put in a chicken skeleton (left over from dinner) in the garbage bin and went about my business (armed with the remote). As she walked up to sniff the garbage, I told her “AAAAAA” and warned her to stay out of the garbage. She looked at me and I gave her the “good” for her correct choice. When she turned back to the garbage, basically ignoring my initial warning, I gave her the BAD for the incorrect choice to include the stomped foot. She flinched at my stomped foot and gave me eye contact...again giving her “good” for turning away from the garbage. But she stuck her head into the garbage bin regardless and I hit her ½ force with the shock of the collar. She basically cowered and darted into the living room. Problem solved. In order to relay punishment, it must be greater than their acceptable tolerance. Rules are rules are rules and in order to enforce those rules, sometimes a really good reminder is needed. I use this system continuously throughout the day never failing to acknowledge their “good” choices.

Once they understand the behavior related language all it takes is a soft “aaaaa” or “good” to shape their behavior with their correct choices made more and more frequently.

Teaching your dog/pup what is acceptable and unacceptable within your home or out on a walk takes time, determination and consistency on your part! You must be more tenacious than your dog/pup. Once they understand the difference they will start looking to you for approval BEFORE they engage in whatever activity they wish to encounter.

I use my behavioral language to guide my dogs on every activity we encounter. Just for an example: when showing my dogs the property boundaries, marked by horse/pasture fencing, at first they will stick one leg under the fence and on the most part look at me for direction. I will say “AAAAAAA” and the moment the foot is on the correct side of the fence, they receive the “good” acknowledging they need to stay on this side of the fence. I only have to show them once and then they are allowed to free play on 17 acres. Like children, dogs need boundaries specified in order to know what the boundaries are. AND because you follow through with your A/U training, they automatically know that pushing your buttons doesn’t end up in their favor.

Once the pup/dog understands this communication method, teaching them anything becomes much easier. You are able to relay to them your expectations such as heeling on a leash. If they move in front of you...a simple “aaaaaa” is given for the incorrect choice; when staying by your side (and not pulling), a “good” is given. If training them to laydown....anything other than laying down is given an “aaaaa”, and the absolute moment they start to lay down, a “good” is given. It’s much like clicker training without the treats or clicker.

Up next....”Teaching the Sit for Attention”

Happy GSPing!

-Becky