



Dominance Myths and Dog Training Realities

As dog trainers and behavior counselors, we are often told by our dog owner clients that their dog is "dominant" because he or she did a particular behavior. In order to provide more insight into why dogs do the things they do, and why it is not "dominance" that leads to these behaviors, we've included a sampling of some of the most common ones below.

Behavior Myth	Why Your Dog Really Does This	How to Change the Behavior
Your dog barks at you to tell you he's in charge.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are numerous underlying factors that can lead to excessive barking such as boredom, fear, and anxiety. • Owners often inadvertently reinforce barking by giving the dog attention when they are barking, or yelling at the dog, which only strengthens the behavior over time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train the dog to bark and be quiet on command. • Proper daily exercise, interaction with a dog's human family, and interactive toys such as Kongs® can decrease barking if the dog is barking out of boredom. • For fearful and/or anxious dogs, determine what is causing the dog's fears and work to desensitize him to them.
Your dog urinates in the house to show you that she owns the "territory" and not you.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inconsistent houstraining techniques by the owner lead to dogs that are never 100% houstrained. • Inappropriate elimination can often be due to an underlying medical condition such as a urinary infection. • Unneutered dogs will mark territory more often than fixed dogs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Go back to "Square one" with your dog and begin houstraining again. • You must be supervise your dog 100% and be able to take him out when he needs to go and reward him for doing so in order for him to clearly understand what is being asked of him. • Take your dog to a veterinarian to determine if there is a physical cause for the behavior.
Your dog believes he is in control of the kitchen and is trying to eat before you.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dogs are scavengers by nature and if food appears to be available, they will take the chance to "go for it!" • Dogs who are bored in the home may resort to counter surfing or digging in the trash to alleviate their boredom. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach your dog to stay out of the kitchen and not to jump on the counters. • Give your dog interactive toys to play with, such as Kongs that you can stuff with food, so he can be steered toward appropriate outlets for his energy.

<p>Dogs jump up on people to assert their height and rank over you.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dogs jump up because they have been inadvertently reinforced to do so by inconsistent dog owners. • Dogs jump up because they want to get closer to our faces to say hello. • Dogs jump up because ... it's fun! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach the dog to sit when visitors enter the house and reward for this behavior. • Teach the dog that he only gets attention, treats, etc. when he has all four paws on the floor. • Make sure everyone who interacts with your dog is on the same page about turning their back on the dog when he jumps up so the behavior is not reinforced in the future.
<p>Dogs pull on leash so they can get out in front of you and be in charge of you and the walk.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If every time the dog gets to go on a walk, they pull you along without being taught any different, they reasonably understand that this is how walks are supposed to be! • Getting to go on a walk is a fun-filled and exciting activity for a dog. They pull because they're enthusiastic and want to get out and enjoy the sights and smells of the outdoors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be absolutely consistent with your dog and do not allow him or her to pull you when you go out on a walk. Take the time to teach them what it is that you do want. • Reinforce the dog heavily for staying next to you, and do not allow the dog to move forward if he is pulling. Teach the dog the "heel" command. • If your dog is too strong for you, use a management device such as a head halter or front clip harness, and use this <i>in conjunction with</i> teaching the dog not to pull so that you can transition to using only a flat collar.
<p>Dogs push you out of the way and run through a doorway ahead of you to show you they're in charge.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Just like with walking on leash, dogs get easily excited and don't know this is unacceptable behavior if you don't teach them otherwise. • You only get pushed because you're in the way of whatever it is on the other side that the dog finds interesting and exciting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach your dog a wait command (or stay command) in door ways and practice so they become used to the idea that you get to come and go first. • Use baby-gates to block the dog from running through the house and use them to teach behavior such as wait, stay or sit at doorways.
<p>Dogs who think they are boss will ignore you when you call them because they know they don't have to obey.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dogs who have not been properly reinforced for coming back to you when called will not understand that "come" means "come here immediately!" • Dogs become stimulated by their environment and can be easily 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach your dog the come command on-leash until your dog is coming every time when called. • Reinforce the dog heavily when he does come - it should be 100% clear to him that he did a great thing by

	<p>distracted by other dogs or animals, people, children, grass, trees, cars, etc.</p>	<p>complying.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Never punish the dog if he doesn't come to you - this only teaches the dog that coming to you when he is called is not a "safe" thing to do.
<p>Dogs mount other dogs or people to show that they are dominant.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mounting occurs for several reasons which include stress alleviation and play. • When dogs play they will often take turns mounting each other for fun - the position is one of playfulness rather than an attempt to establish status. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the dog is doing this to you, simply give the dog an incompatible behavior to do instead and reward them for doing so, such as sit, down, a trick, or anything else.
<p>Dogs get on the furniture and/or beds to show that they rule the household.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dogs get on furniture and/or beds for the same reasons that people do - because they're very comfortable. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach your dog an "off" command so they learn to get down off the furniture when you ask them to. • If you do not want your dog on the furniture at any time, manage the household so that the dog is not able to get up on the furniture unawares. If they do, this reinforces that it's ok to sit on the furniture - you want to be able to block this from happening using baby gates, tethers, etc. • Provide the dog with a comfy dog bed or beds of his own and reinforce the dog for choosing to lay on them. • Finally, if you don't mind having your dog on the furniture but are afraid this means they're dominating you - relax! As long as you are setting the rules and guidelines in your house, it's ok for your dog to be on the furniture with you.