

APDT POSITION STATEMENT DOMINANCE MYTHS AND DOG TRAINING REALITIES

As dog trainers and behavior consultants, 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 examples 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 can actually strengthen the behavior over time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train the dog to bark and be quiet on cue. • Proper daily exercise, interaction with a dog's human family, and interactive toys such as Kong® toys 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, not you, owns the "territory."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inconsistent housetraining techniques by the owner lead to dogs that are never 100% housetrained. • 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 housetraining again. • You must supervise your dog 100% of the time, be able to take him out when he needs to go, and reward him for going in the right place, in order for him to 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, so if food appears to be available, they will use the opportunity 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 Kong® toys stuffed 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 reinforce this behavior with treats and attention. • 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 ignoring 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 goes on a walk, he pulls you along successfully, it's reasonable for the dog to think 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 the dog 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. • 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 a flat collar or back-clip harness in the future.
<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 a stay command) for doors and practice so the dog becomes used to the idea that you get to come and go first. • Use baby-gates to block the dog from running through the house. You can also use baby gates to make it easier to teach behavior such as wait, stay or sit at door ways.

<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 distracted by other dogs or animals, people, children, grass, trees, cars, etc. 	<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 coming to you when you called him. • Never punish the dog if he doesn't come to you - this 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 can 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 mounting you, simply give the dog an incompatible behavior to do instead, such as sit, down, or a trick, and reward the dog for doing that behavior.
<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 off of 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 unobserved. Every time the dog gets on the furniture, it reinforces the idea 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 comfortable dog bed or beds of his own and reinforce the dog for choosing to lie 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.
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