

The Human Dog Pack

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The psychology of “**Dominance**” is defined as.

liking to take control in a group and having natural authority:

*The females breed with **dominant** males that establish and defend territories.*

*You can have a dominant personality **without** being a bully.*

(www.dictionary.cambridge.org, 2022)

It does not define dominance as an act of cruelty or aggression. It is a misconception, especially in some parts of the dog world, that dominance does not exist, but also means being cruel by using aversive techniques. The same people who deny the existence of dominance in dogs, accept some dogs display submissive behaviour. Well, you cannot have one without the other, it's like Yin and Yang. I can assure you; dominance does exist in any gregarious pack environment.

A dominant dog is one who is calm, assertive, and confident, the individual that other dogs want to follow. The dominant dog controls access to food and toys when it wants to claim them. It does not mean the dominant dog is aggressive, nor does it mean a dominant dog will not allow other dogs in its social group access to such things. When we live in a human dog pack, we must take on the dominant role. We should therefore maintain an assertive and confident attitude to our relationship with them, setting boundaries, control, and consequences as necessary to ensure harmony. Of course, dogs realise that we are not dogs, but we still form part of their social group (pack) along with the hierarchy it entails. Dogs thrive on clarity in their relationship with their humans, just like the relationship between a Shepherd and their Collie. Where would the sheep end up if the Collie did not follow his master's clear rules and directions? Without order, there is chaos! *(J. L. Barnes)*

Within my personal pack, my six-year-old entire male Malinois called Giggs, is the most dominant dog in the group. When I let them all out to exercise, the others will naturally follow his lead and general direction of travel. He can be quite dismissive of their attention and even snap at those members of the social group who harass him too much, such as the adolescent younger males who constantly demand his attention, sometimes barking incessantly. If there is a toy he desires, he takes control of it, regardless of the desire of other

members within the group who wish to play with it and will growl at them to back away if he feels they desire it. The other dogs in my pack are therefore respectful (submissive) to him and if needs be, will show this by displaying the appropriate body language. These behaviours create a hierarchy and stability in the pack. The younger dogs are also submissive to the older bitch in the group, who in turn is submissive to Giggs. It is the way of the world, not everyone can be a leader.

The psychology is identical to that of a human who takes on the role of a natural leader in a group. That person does not have to be aggressive or intimidating, confidence and body language is normally sufficient, and often the more naturally submissive individuals will follow their lead. Problems such as arguments may ensue when you have two naturally dominant people with differing opinions within the group. Therefore, two male dogs may fight to establish rank if neither is prepared to accept the other has a more dominant role within that particular social group environment.

When a parent tells their child to clean their teeth or to chew their food with their mouth closed, they are exerting their will and therefore their dominance over the child. They do not have to beat the child for them to comply as the child should be naturally submissive to the parent. The parent will ask the child to repeat this behaviour daily, thereby creating good habits. This is the same way we teach our dogs to learn, by creating habitual behaviours that we as humans desire. Dogs do not naturally want to down stay; it is a behaviour we teach them by repetitively exerting our will over them by rewarding the behaviour we desire. All obedience is a process of dominance.

“Obedience” - *the act or practice of obeying; dutiful or submissive compliance.*
(www.dictionary.com, 2022)

As parents we control access to toys, we allow our children to play with them when we deem it is appropriate. We also control food, especially high value treats which we will allow our children to have on our terms and often after we ensure they have earned them with good behaviour. These are the same principles we should adopt with our dogs. In any hierarchical group the responsibility for control gets passed on to the next in line who is present. As humans we also adopt this philosophy in our workplace, by having managers, supervisors, and workers...a hierarchy that works for the good of all members within the group!