

## Incorporating a few simple things into your daily routine will establish you as "Top Dog" so your dog will be happy, well-behaved, and a pleasure to be around.



Top Dog is leader of the pack. Dogs fit into human families so well because they are pack animals. All pack animals have a social structure that places one leader at the head of the group. This pack leader (or Top Dog) has the responsibility of setting all the rules and enforcing them. The Top Dog is not the one who can shout the loudest or terrorize other pack members. Instead, the best pack leader has an outstanding ability to communicate with others.

Your dog is counting on you to be the Top Dog. If it's unclear who the leader is in your house, your dog will try to be Top Dog - because somebody has to do it! Dogs like to have a leader in charge; it helps them feel confident and secure in their own position.

### Follow these rules to be Top Dog:



**Top Dog Provides the Food.** Ask your dog to do "something," such as a trick or a simple "sit" for their bowl of food. Once they perform the trick (or sit), give permission ("take it" or "OK") to eat. Making food an event or competition can make a dog challenge you. It's easier and just plain more fun to ask the dog to sit and then leave her alone to eat. You don't like it when someone tries to take your food away, why should your dog?



**Top Dog Gets the Best Bed.** Provide your dog with a safe place such as a dog bed, blanket, and/or crate in a common area (but away from a lot of foot traffic). As Top Dog, all the furniture belongs to you. You may share, but make your dog wait to be invited onto the bed or couch ("Fido, Visit!").

If your dog gives you trouble when you ask her to get off the furniture, don't allow her up in the first place. If your dog sneaks up and won't get off when told, attach a long cord to her collar (regular collar only, not a choke/training collar) while you and she are both in the house. When you find her on the furniture, simply walk by, say "OFF," and pull the leash with you (no yelling or jerking the leash). Do this consistently and she will soon get the message.

Once in awhile, move your dog's bed to a new spot or ask her to get off it while you stand on it for a few minutes. This helps show you are the Top Dog, and will give you greater control of your dog.



**Top Dog Decides What Games to Play, and When.** Encourage your dog to play with a toy a few times each day. Maintain control of the games by keeping most dog toys out of your dog's reach. Ask your dog to perform a simple command (sit, down, stay, etc.) before rewarding her with a toy and playtime.

The Top Dog "lets" other dogs win once in awhile - so playing is fun for everyone! When the game is over, though, you keep the toys. To keep things fresh and fun, rotate the toys that are left out for your dog



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every couple of weeks.



Pay attention to your dog and don't allow her to get over-excited during play sessions. If your dog becomes too excited, play-growls, or gets too mouthy, discourage this by putting the toy immediately away and taking a "time out." Tug of War is a hard game to win, so never play tugging games unless your dog already understands that you are Top Dog and "drops it" when asked.



**Top Dog Decides When It's Grooming Time.** Gently brush and handle your dog every day and clip her nails every week. This will minimize skin problems, mats, and external parasites. Handle her as a vet will during an exam - look at her teeth and ears, lift her legs, gently hold her paws, and check for signs of fleas and ticks. Pay attention to any bumps, changes, or tender spots on your dog's body and check with your vet if you notice anything strange. Your dog will learn to love this massage and bonding time with you. It will also lower your stress AND you'll have the best-behaved dog at the vet. ***If your dog is not used to being handled and growls, snaps, or bites, call MHS for help in training her to accept being handled.***

Make grooming a pleasant experience by giving her a treat to distract her. Don't do too much too soon. Plan your grooming sessions just before feeding, playing with, or exercising your dog, and she will soon look forward to the grooming.



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