

The following article is reprinted from the *Canis Major* website at <http://www.canismajor.com>

Tough Love works for dogs, too!

“But how can I say ‘no’ to him, he’s just so cute?”

“I just can’t say no when she rolls those beautiful brown eyes at me!” laments Polly Jones, whose four-year-old Shih Tzu bitch sits in Polly’s favourite chair and begs for scraps at meal and snack times. But Shasta is beginning to growl if Polly crowds her in the chair and leaps frantically for a share when the kids are eating a bowl of ice cream after dinner.

“Czar is so cute”, Paul Johnson tells his friends. “Every evening when we relax in front of the television, he grabs my leg and starts humping. And he knows just when 11 o’clock rolls around – he beats us to the bed!” But Czar is a large dog: Sharon Johnson can no longer control him on a leash, and he has begun to growl if she rolls against him in the bed.

“I just can’t put Mango in a cage”, Roberta Clear complains, “but if I leave her alone, she goes crazy, tearing up my furniture and messing on the floor.”

Shasta, Czar and Mango are doing what comes naturally to dogs – taking the lead when their owners have abrogated their authority. These three pets and tens of thousands of others are benevolent canine dictators, arranging their families to suit their needs and using intimidation when necessary to prove a point.

The Pack as Power

Dogs, of course, are wolves in a variety of shapes, sizes and colours, but thousands of years of domesticity have moderated their pack behaviour. Wolves band together in family groups to assure survival. They hunt together, instinctively limit reproduction so that the whole pack can care for a single litter, and keep inter-pack squabbles to a minimum to conserve energy.

Dogs don’t have to hunt for their food, so they do not need to cooperate with the rest of the pack to chase down a deer or elk. Their reproduction is limited by their owners, not by instinct, and their attitudes towards squabbles depends on breed and circumstances, not on a need to save themselves for the hunt. However, from Chihuahua to Great Dane, they do retain some smattering of pack drives that require owners to exert some authority or risk developing their pet into a four-footed king of the realm.

That moderate dusting of wolf behaviour inherited by puppies gives dog owners a valuable tool for teaching pet manners and delimiting unacceptable conduct.

The pack is a hierarchy of power. Every human in the family has more power than the dog. Of course, humans have the responsibility to exercise that power with kindness and compassion, but exercise it they must if the pup is to become a canine good citizen. Every dog has to respect the

hierarchy of power in the household. Submissive dogs will do so willingly, but domineering dogs can be a problem. And even the tiniest Chihuahua can have an imperious attitude.

There are no exceptions to the rule. Even mild-mannered Mums and busy Dads (and mild mannered Dads and busy Mums) must show the puppy the advantages of obeying commands, and the kids must follow suit. It does no good if Mum wields an iron fist in a velvet glove and Dad and kids let Fido rule the roost.



The Plan

To prevent Fido from becoming king of the castle, owners need to assert their leadership through tough love. They should never allow puppies to develop behaviours that would be unacceptable in a full grown dog. Instead, human pack leaders need to determine ahead of time what they will tolerate and what is verboten and then guide the puppy to appropriate behaviour.

Tough love begins when the puppy has his first meal in his new home. No matter how hungry he seems, no matter how much he fusses and jumps around, he must learn to sit before he’s fed. Not only does this simple exercise prevent him from jumping at the dish and possibly spilling its contents. It lays the groundwork for a relationship that you control.

If you hold the dish above the puppy’s head, he’ll have to sit to look up to it. Lower the dish slowly; if he moves before it reaches the floor, raise it until he sits again. Puppies learn fast – most will get it in a day or two and sit and wait for the dish to be put on the floor without a command.

Tough love continues as you teach the puppy the rules. If Pedro is a Great Dane puppy and won’t be allowed on the furniture when he’s 32 inches tall and weighs 140 pounds, don’t ‘let him on the furniture when he’s a mere 25 pounds.

If you expect Maestro on a leash when he reaches his full Mastiff size, teach him to walk nicely on a leash from the beginning.

If you expect Sasha to leave you alone while you are eating, don’t feed her from your plate. EVER. Instead, teach her to lie down on her rug or in her bed or in the corner while you eat. No pleading eyes, upraised paws or drooling should shake your resolve; you set the rules, you enforce the rules, and Fluffy obeys the rules.

Tough love may actually be tougher on you than it is on Daisy. After all, you’re the one who has to resist the cocked head and pleading look and make sure the rest of the family does the same.