

## **ALPHA ROLL OR JELLY ROLL; ESTABLISHING PACK LEADERSHIP**

By Cheryl Minnier  
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Dogs operate in a pack structure. Every pack must have a leader. If a dog understands that you are the undisputed pack leader, he can be content to be a follower. If there is any doubt in the dog's mind that there is a strong leader in charge, he will feel the need to assume the position himself. For most dogs it doesn't matter who is the leader, as long as someone is and they are doing a good job. Dogs will worship and happily give deference to the leader or alpha. Letting your dog know who is in charge will NOT make him dislike you! It will give him a secure feeling that someone is in charge and all is right with the world. The exceptions to this include the dominant, un-neutered male, or the adolescent who feels the need to challenge the accepted pack leadership. When these dogs learn that they are unable to dethrone the current leader and with continued training they will usually return to acceptable behavior.

How can you demonstrate competent pack leadership? VIOLENCE IS NOT THE ANSWER!!! There is no need to resort to physical punishment. This will most likely only make matters worse. Remember, all dogs are different. Some dogs need constant reinforcement regarding who is in charge and others will always be content to be followers. The following are dominant behaviors that you should recognize. If a dog frequently displays these behaviors, you will need to take steps to establish yourself as the leader:

- Ignoring known commands. This is the dog telling you you aren't worth listening to!
- Refusing to lie down on command. This is a serious sign that the dog is challenging your authority.
- Bumping into you or your children. This is a sign of disrespect.
- Mounting you or your children. This does not mean that the dog finds you attractive, it is a sign that he wants to dominate you.
- Refusing to give up sleeping areas. Dominant animals don't relinquish their spot for subordinate pack members.
- Stops eating or chewing when you approach. The dog is warning you not to bother him. This is unacceptable.
- Staring. A dominant member of the pack will use eye contact to intimidate. We all want our dogs attention, but a dog who will not look away when you try to stare him down is displaying dominance.
- Growling. Do not make excuses for a growling dog! This is unacceptable behavior! If your dog growls at you, speak with a competent trainer as soon as possible. He or she should be able to teach you how to deal with the problem.

(Portions of this list taken from an article by Brian Kilcommons)

If you have a dominant dog, you need to take steps to establish yourself as the top dog. If your dog is dominant aggressive (showing signs of aggression; biting, growling, showing his teeth -

combined with the above behaviors), a canine behaviorist is a valuable resource. He or she can help you determine a program, usually using the steps outlined below, that is SAFE for you to try with your dog. Some trainers (rarely behaviorists) recommend an Alpha Roll to help establish dominance. This involves swiftly rolling a dog on his back and holding him there until he submits by lying still and looking away. It may be accompanied by growling or shaking the dog. This maneuver is patterned after something that wolves and dogs sometimes do to each other while fighting. Brood bitches will also sometimes roll their puppies in the whelping box. A true alpha roll is an aggressive measure, and if a dog is prone to aggression, he will feel the need to defend himself. If this is the case - you could be seriously hurt! Dogs and wolves do not do this routinely - only in very specific instances - that usually involve aggression of some kind. Routinely alpha rolling your dog only invites mistrust and confusion at best, at worst - aggression. Slowly rolling a dog on his back and holding him there is NOT an alpha roll. It can be considered a training exercise, similar to a long down.

*\*\*\*If you feel threatened or unsafe carrying out any of the behaviors described below, get professional help immediately. If you cannot resolve the problems with a behavior modification program alone or combined with medication, you may need to consider euthanasia. Serious cases i.e. dogs who have bitten someone or who are showing aggression, need direction beyond the scope of this article. In order to be certain of your own safety, please consult with a qualified professional.\*\*\**

Some steps that you can take to establish or re-establish pack leadership include:

- Insist on obedience, a command given must be obeyed. Do not repeat the command, simply physically help the dog carry it out. If you are not in a position to enforce a command, don't give it!
- Make sure the dog knows he works for you - give him a job to do! He should sit before meals and you should always eat first. You should decide when to pet him and when to stop (nudging your hand so you will begin petting is not acceptable.) If the dog asks to be petted, ignore him until he stops then make him sit, pet him for only 15-20 seconds and you be the one to stop. Never stroke him until he decides to walk away. Ignore further requests for attention for at least 10 minutes.
- Ask the dog to stand while you put on a lead before going outside; in other words give the dog a job to do!
- If you are walking and the dog is lying in your path, make him move. As alpha, you are entitled to go anywhere you please.
- Routinely put the dog on a long down. You should sit on the floor at first and take the phone off the hook. You don't want to be disturbed! Give the command to down or place your dog in a lying position. If he tries to get up, put him back down, but do not keep your hands on him. Keep him down for 15 minutes even if you have to put him back down 50 times. Gradually work up to 30 minute long downs with you in a chair beside him. If you continue these 3-4 times a week, you should see a significant difference in the dog's behavior.

Rather than resent this, he will, in time, be happier with a firm chain of command. A dog who is secure with his place in the world is a happy dog! Most of these things will not be necessary with

a submissive dog as he will do them naturally. If you are having no problems with dominance with your dog they can simply be used occasionally.

A successful human-canine bond is based on trust and respect. Acts of aggression by you will only damage that trust. Allowing the dog to assert control will ensure that no respect exists. The key to establishing a wonderful relationship is to be firm, fair and consistent. You should also remember that a correction should never be given in anger. If you are angry with your dog, that is the time to put him in his crate and give yourself time to cool off and decide on the best way to proceed.