

PROTOCOL FOR DEFERENCE: BASIC PROGRAM

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Dog's social systems are very similar to those of humans. They live in extended family groups. They have extensive and extended parental care. They work as a group or a family to help care for the offspring. They nurse their young before feeding them semisolid, then solid food. They use play as one form of developing social skills. They communicate extensively vocally; and most important, they have a social system that is based on deference to others. Fights for status or control are notoriously rare among wild canines such as wolves. Except in what humans perceive to be abnormal social conditions, most human social relations are structured by negotiation and deference to others rather than by violence. Deference-structured hierarchies mean that the individual to whom others defer may differ depending on the social circumstances. Status and circumstances are not absolute. In the human situation, a child may defer to his parents' requests but then be the leader on the playground to whom other children defer. Dogs are similar.

Much has been written about dogs viewing their human families as their pack. Although the pack comparison is not exact, dogs are social and generally look to their people for guidance. Dogs often become problems when they cease to do this or if they never do this. This program is the first step in both *preventing* such problems and in *treating* all forms of behavioral problems. All social animals create some form of rule structure. This structure allows them to communicate with each other. Because dogs are so similar to humans in so many ways and so frequently appear to be attentive to every word, it is assumed that they are complying with human rule structure. Puppies actually need guidance in how to do this, and problem dogs need to have a consistent, benign, kind rule structure explicitly spelled out for them. This is a kind of benign doggy boot camp; if the dog knows a consistent rule or behavior that will get the attention of its people; the dog will then be receptive to guidance. This is a form of discipline. People often confuse discipline with violence or abuse. The following program should be executed without violence or physical abuse. In fact, for most dogs, withdrawal of attention is a far more profound correction than is physical abuse. Abused dogs or those consistently mismanaged with physical punishment either learns to override the punishment or learn to seek it because it may be their most common contact.

The intent of this program is to set a baseline of good behavioral interaction between the client and pet and to teach the dog that it must consistently defer to people to receive attention. This is done in a safe, kind, passive manner and is more difficult than clients frequently acknowledge. The reason is as follows: if the clients are talking, reading or watching television and the dog comes up to them and rubs, paws, or leans against them, the clients usually passively reach out and touch or pet the dog. The *dog* controlled that entire interaction. Score: dog, 1; human, 0—and the people do not even know that they were conveying any signals other than affection to the dog.

Under no circumstances can the clients touch, love, or otherwise interact with the dog unless the dog defers and awaits their attention. This is done by having the dog sit. Sitting need not be prolonged (5 to 15 seconds), and very young puppies may not do it perfectly because they are wiggle worms. Regardless, pups as young as 5 weeks of age can learn to sit and attend to the client (look at them for cues, make eye contact, look happy and attentive while being quiet) in exchange for a food treat. As soon as the puppy sits, the person should say, "Good girl/boy!" and give a tiny treat of something special. Also praise and pet the pup.

For a dog that already knows how to sit, the only problem is going to be to reinforce this for everything that the dog wants. The rule is, *the dog must sit and be quiet to earn anything and everything it wants for the rest of its life*. This includes sitting for the following:

- Food and feeding
- Treats
- Love

- Grooming
- Being able to go out—and come in
- Having the leash, harness or halter put on
- Having feet toweled
- Being invited onto the bed or sofa
- Playing games, playing with toys
- Having a wound checked, or a tick removed
- Attention—*Anything the dog wants!*

All the dog must do is put its bottom on the floor or ground, be quiet, look at the client, and await the client's cue. This takes only seconds, but its value is inestimable. *All* dogs should learn this, and *no* dog is too old to learn this. If the dog is older or arthritic, it might be more comfortable lying down. All puppies should be raised with this simple but powerful deference behavior. This *will not* take away a dog's spunk, fire, or individuality. It *will* allow the client to have a far better relationship with the dog and to control the dog. The latter can be critical if the dog puts itself in a potentially injurious position.

If the client has a very pushy or very energetic dog, the client may find that it constantly monitoring and correcting the dog's behavior is exhausting. If this happens, the client will become angry at the dog and will not practice the behavior modification correctly, *and* the client will eventually be worn down by the dog. If the latter happens, the dog will have learned to hone its obnoxious behaviors. For such clients, a better option may be to banish and ignore the pet, unless they are actively working with them. This is *not* the same as the withdrawal of affection recommended by many training manuals. Withdrawal of affection will make anxious dogs more anxious and will make clients feel sad, angry, or guilty. Such circumstances will worsen, not improve, the situation. However, by giving themselves permission *not* to have to monitor the dog's every breath, clients can then better comply with this protocol and the protocol for relaxation when they are with the pet. In fact, unless clients are absolutely willing to exhibit the extensive degree of vigilance recommended here, it is preferable to banish the dog to a place where it can be ignored but not neglected. Such places should be dry and comfortable, protected from the elements, safe and somewhat amusing for the dog. Toys, balls, and marrowbones can provide amusement or stimulation, as can Kong toys filled with peanut butter. Caution is urged in using food with *any* dog with *any* food-associated aggressions. Clients must be able to retrieve the dog and then induce it to practice these protocols. If clients choose to actively banish or ignore the dog as a part of the method for enforcing the protocol for deference, they must be willing to establish and maintain regularly scheduled periods of interaction in which the deference protocol is *always* enforced. This will take a minimum of 20 minutes twice a day. Several (8-12) 10-to-15-minute sessions per day are preferred when banishment is used. Remember, *any time* the dog is with the client, the protocol for deference *must* be enforced. This means no attention for the dog unless the dog is quietly sitting.

What does such a protocol do to treat or prevent problem behaviors?

1. Sitting and deferring for everything the dog wants, forever, reinforces the innate social structure of the dog and teaches it to look to its people for cues about the appropriateness of its behavior.
2. Deference behaviors can act as a form of "time out": they give the dog respite from a situation so that it does not worsen. The dog can learn that if it responds to a person's request to sit, the person will help it decide what the next best behavior is. This is a great relief to dogs that are anxious about appropriate responses (i.e., many dogs with behavioral problems).
3. Deference behaviors allow the dog to calm down. A sitting dog is less reactive than one that is running around; thus these behaviors allow the dog to couple a verbal cue, a behavior, and the psychological response to that behavior. This has a calming effect.
4. Deference behaviors, consistently reinforced, allow the dog to anticipate what is expected and to be able to *earn* attention.

Points to Remember:

1. Starting immediately, the dog must earn everything that it wants for the rest of its life. The dog does this by quietly sitting and staying for a few moments (deferring to you).
2. The dog is requested to sit by using its name and then saying "Sit." This can be repeated every three to five seconds as needed (this is *not* an obedience class exercise).
3. If the dog resists or refuses to comply—*walk away from the dog*. The dog will eventually follow. When the dog appears or demand attention, ask it to sit as prescribed above. If the dog resists, walk away from the dog. Sooner or later this dog will capitulate. Outlast it.
4. As soon as the dog sits, reward it with praise. A food reward will hasten the process for a dog that does not know how to sit. The next step is to teach the dog "stay." Remember that the dog must stay until released. Because the point of this protocol is to enforce deference that can be generalized, quick releases are desired. Later you can practice long stays and downs as part of an overall relaxation and behavior modification program.
5. Watch for subtle, pushy, defiant behaviors that the dog may exhibit. Expect to occasionally make mistakes—do not fight the rest of the family about it. This will not help the dog. Expect to be a little frustrated. Remember that dogs read body language far better than you do and that they are watching for their opportunity. Use that watchful behavior and shape it into deference behaviors.
6. Remember that everyone in the household must be consistent and work with the dog. Children need to be monitored to ensure their safety and to help them not teach the dog the wrong behavior. Children must understand the difference between a food salary and a bribe and must be taught not to tease the dog. Dangling food in front of a dog at a distance is an invitation to get up and lunge. Everyone must return to the dog to reward it, tell it to stay, and quickly couple verbal praise with the food treat that should magically appear on an unfolded, flat hand.
7. Reward the dog. This should be fun—for everyone.

Teaching Sit!

Consider using a food reward or salary, particularly if the dog must reshape undesirable behaviors. Many humans have a tremendous resistance to food rewards for dogs. The charitable explanation for this is that they do not understand that a food reward is not a bribe, but rather a salary. It is important to understand the difference and to avoid bribes.

A bribe comes a priori (before the desired behavior) as a lure to distract or compete with the dog so that it does not commit a behavior that the clients are otherwise impotent to control. This is a sad but common situation in which clients find themselves. A reward or a salary comes a posteriori (after the fact) in exchange for a behavior perfectly executed in response to a request from the clients. This means that the dog is attending to the clients' desires, awaiting their intentions, deferring to their needs, and responding appropriately, for which it has learned it can *earn* a reward.

Clients are generally receptive to these differences and quickly realize not only that have they been bribing their dogs, but also that they have not felt too good about themselves for doing so. A reward structure sets the standard for compassionate but disciplined control.

Food rewards may not be necessary to teach and enforce deference behaviors to dogs that already know how to sit; they can be very useful in teaching puppies that do not know how to sit how to do so. Puppies are babies and have short attention spans. Food helps them focus.

If the food treat is held in one of the client's hands between two fingers and that hand is first placed in front of the pup's nose and then raised up and back, the pup's head will begin to move to follow it. Gradually the pup will sit because it is easier and more comfortable to do so. If the client is saying "Sit (2 to 3-second pause), sit (2 to 3-second pause)," and so on while doing this and as soon

as the puppy accidentally sits says, “Good dog!” and instantly gives the treat, the pup will be reinforced in the appropriate time. This must be repeated until the puppy does it flawlessly and without hesitation. This generally takes less than 30 minutes for a pup that has not yet developed bad or inattentive behaviors.

Is it necessary to push on the puppy’s bottom to make it sit? No, and given how big people are and how small puppies can be, it might be unwise to do this. This is especially true for dogs that might be predisposed to later hip problems.

There are three other alternatives:

1. Clients can gently put a hand behind the puppy’s bottom so that as the dog backs up, it bumps into the hand. The client can then gently shape the puppy to sit and reward as mentioned previously.
2. Clients can have another person stand behind the pup with his or her feet near the pup’s haunches: as the pup backs up the person’s feet and legs will shape the puppies body in the sit position.
3. A Gentle Leader/Promise System Canine Head Collar or Halti can be used to help the client quickly teach the pup to sit.

Teaching Stay!

“Stay” can be more difficult to teach than “sit” because the tendency is to rush the dog and proceed at a pace more suitable for the person than for the dog. This response is rooted partly in the client’s feelings that if the dog does not comply instantly, the dog is stupid and the client is in error. This is not true, so everyone can stop feeling guilty. There is much variation in dogs’ abilities to relax and stay, and clients often unwittingly give inconsistent signals with their body language. Among the most common of the inconsistent signals is talking to the dog over one’s shoulder and telling it to stay while going away from the dog. Dogs that do not know “stay” will not learn it by this approach and will be distressed.

Before the dog can learn to stay, it first must know how to sit. If the dog is physically more comfortable lying down, that is fine. This is not an obedience class, no points will be awarded, and no trophies will be given. The point is to start the animal in a posture of deferential behavior. Sitting is a less reactive posture than is standing, and lying down, so it is preferable for them.

Next, tell the dog to sit, verbally praise it, say “*stay*,” and take a microscopic step backward. Repeat “stay,” go back to the dog, repeat “stay,” and reward. A sample sequence proceeds as follows: “Bonnie—sit—good girl! (treat)—stay—good girl—stay (take a step backward while saying stay—then stop) stay Bonnie—good girl—stay (return while saying stay—then stop)—Bonnie—good girl (treat)—okay!” (the releaser and Bonnie gets up).

Note the Following:

1. Use the dog’s name—this will get it to attend to you. You can use it frequently, unlike in obedience, provided it attends to you. In fact, the name should be the cue to orient toward you. If the dog does not look at you immediately put the treat near your eye. The dog needs to focus. (You can couple the treat next to your eye with the vocal signal “look.”)
2. Repeat the commands. This is not obedience—the dog needs your reassurance. As the dog improves or learns more, repeat the commands less frequently and at greater intervals. This is what psychologist’s call “shaping” a behavior.

3. Reward the dog appropriately. Eventually the food treats will appear less predictably. At the outset the dog needs everything possible to help it.
4. Remember to use one or two words consistently as a *releaser*—and remember that if you use those words while talking to the dog, the dog will get up. If the dog gets up before released, make it stay and stay again, and wait 3 to 5 seconds before you release the dog. This prevents jack-in-the-box behavior.

As the dog becomes more experienced and masters staying at a short distance, gradually increase the distance between you and the dog. Do not go from getting the dog to stay within 1 meter of you to walking across the room. The temptation will be great and you will have only provoked conflict and anxiety in the dog, which defeats your goal.

This protocol can be done with the dog on lead with a head collar. Head collars, when coupled with long-distance leads, allow you to reinforce sitting and to correct the dog if it gets up.

Training and Obedience

Positive training can benefit both pets and owners, which is why we recommend that you invest some time teaching your puppy basic obedience. Going to an obedience class will socialize your puppy with other pets and with new people, and help build the comfort level your pet needs to deal with new situations without becoming afraid. Sharing time in such a fun environment will strengthen your bond with your pet. It will strengthen your family's bond, as well, when you bring home the newest "trick" for them to practice. Finally, obedience classes help to teach owners how to better interact with their dog, benefiting everyone involved.

Here are a few obedience classes and trainers in the area:

Twin Cities Obedience Training Club (TCOC) 612-379-1332
www.tcotc.com

Animal Humane Society of Hennepin County 763-522-4325
www.animalhumanesociety.org/training/dog-training-class-schedules

Total Recall, Hugo, MN 651-464-1799
www.trdogs.com

Avagyn Acres, Maple Grove, MN 763-634-1899
www.Avagynacres.com

Veterinary Behavior Specialties of Minnesota, Minnetonka, MN
612-554-1182 www.vetbehaviormn.com