

## Teaching your aggressive dog deferential behavior

**Y**our dog has dominance aggression, a behavior disorder that can be corrected with time and patience. It must learn to defer to you before you let it do anything—eat, go inside or outside, have a leash put on, sit on the sofa or bed, play with toys, even get your love and attention. Actually, all dogs should be raised this way, and no dog is too old to learn this behavior. It will not lessen your dog's spunk or individuality. It will allow you to have a better, more trusting relationship with your dog and help you control your dog, which is critical if it puts itself in a potentially harmful position.

So starting immediately, your dog must earn everything that it wants for the rest of its life. The dog does this by deferring to you, which means sitting quietly and staying for a few moments.

When teaching your dog to defer, be sure to work with it on a regular schedule of 15 to 20 minutes once or twice a day. Don't scream at or hit the dog; these are unacceptable methods of punishment. Let's review how you teach a dog to sit and stay.

### Teaching your dog to sit

A food treat, such as small slivers of boiled chicken or tiny pieces of cheese, is essential when teaching a dog to sit. Keep the treats in a cup behind your back so the dog does not lunge for the food. Take one treat from the cup and place it in front of the dog's nose. Say "sit" while moving the treat up and over the dog's head. As you raise the treat up and back, the dog's head will begin to move to follow it. Gradually, the dog will sit because it's easier and more comfortable to do so. As soon as the dog accidentally sits, say "Good dog!" and instantly give the treat. Repeat this process until the dog does it flawlessly and without hesitation. This will generally take less than 30 minutes for a dog that has not yet developed bad or inattentive behaviors.

It's not necessary to push on the dog's hindquarters to make it sit. In fact, this could harm the dog. For large-breed dogs that are predisposed to hip problems, early trauma such as pressure on the hips may exacerbate this condition. Even if your dog has no hip pain and no physical problems, shoving the dog into a seated position could scare and hurt the dog and make it fearful of sitting.

Instead, gently put a hand behind the dog's bottom so that as it backs up, it bumps into your hand. You can then encourage the dog to sit and reward it as stated above. You can also have another person stand behind the dog near the dog's haunches. As the dog backs up, the person's feet and legs will help guide the dog's body into a seated position. A Gentle Leader® Headcollar (Premier Pet Products, Richmond, Va.) or most other head collars can also help you quickly teach your dog to sit. It is important to follow the instructions that accompany the head collar to ensure that you use it appropriately.

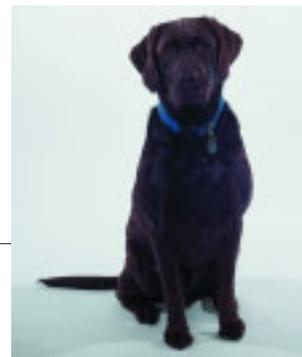
Some dogs work better for play (e.g. chasing a ball) than they do for food rewards. This is perfectly acceptable, although a little more difficult to execute. Just be sure to use some type of reward along with your praise. Continue to reward the dog long after you think the dog needs it. As the dog progresses, continue to praise it but offer the rewards more intermittently to maintain the dog's interest and attention. When the dog has mastered the desired behavior, intermittent rewards help maintain it.

### Teaching your dog to stay

"Stay" can be more difficult to teach than "sit" because the tendency is to rush the dog. Often without realizing it, you may be giving inconsistent signals with your body language. For example, you may say "stay" over your shoulder while you walk away from the dog. Dogs that do not know how to stay won't learn from this and will be distressed. The best way to teach a dog to stay is to take it one step at a time.

First, the dog needs to know how to sit or lie down, whichever is more comfortable, at your request. Tell the dog to "sit," praise it, say "stay," and take a small step backward. Repeat "stay," go back to the dog, repeat "stay," and give the dog a reward. Then say "OK!" as a release so the dog will know it can get up.

Using your dog's name will help it focus its attention on you. You can use it frequently as long as the dog remains attentive. In fact, the dog's name should be its cue to orient toward you. If it doesn't look at you immediately, put the treat near your eye and say "look." You need the



dog to focus. You can also use the “look” request to get the dog to refocus throughout the training process.

Repeat the requests until you get your dog to respond to you, and give it a chance between repetitions to respond. The dog needs your reassurance and ongoing instruction. As the dog improves or learns more, you can repeat your requests less frequently.

Reward the dog with a treat appropriately. Dangling food in front of a dog from a distance is an invitation for it to get up and lunge. Instead, go to the dog, tell it to stay, and quickly couple verbal praise with the food treat. Eventually, give a food treat less predictably. But at the outset, the dog needs everything you can do to help it.

Also remember to use one or two words consistently as a release, such as “OK.” Then remember that if you use those words while talking to the dog, the dog will get up. If the dog gets up before you release it, make it stay, and wait three to five seconds before releasing it.

As your dog becomes more experienced and masters staying at a short distance, gradually increase the distance between you and the dog. Doing this on a long lead with a head collar will allow you, from a distance, to reinforce sitting and correct the dog if it gets up. Don’t go from getting the dog to stay within three feet of you to walking across the room. The temptation to rush will be great, but all this does is provoke conflict and anxiety in the dog, which defeats your purpose.

### Teaching deference

Once your dog can sit and stay at your request, you are ready to teach deference. Your dog must learn to defer to you before receiving anything it wants. For example, if it wants to go outside, first ask your dog to sit by using its name and saying “sit.” Do not yell at the dog. Speak softly and ask—don’t order, even if you’ve yelled at the dog in the past. Repeat “sit” every three to five seconds as needed if the dog is still paying attention. If the dog is inattentive and changing your voice or posture doesn’t improve the dog’s attentiveness, walk away.

If your dog is attentive but refuses to comply, walk away. The dog will eventually follow you, and when it appears or demands attention, ask it to sit as described above. If the dog continues to resist, walk away again.

Sooner or later your dog will comply.

As soon as your dog sits, reward it with praise and a treat. The next step is to get your dog to stay. The dog must stay until you release it. (Early in this training program, quick releases are best.) Once your dog is sitting and staying, you may release it by using a key phrase, such as “OK!” You can then allow the dog to go outside.

Watch for subtle, pushy, defiant behaviors that the dog may exhibit (e.g. sitting and pressing against you, coming to you slowly and making detours, stamping its feet and snorting, or sitting at an angle to you rather than facing you), but ignore them—don’t challenge the dog. When pushy behaviors decrease in frequency, you and the dog are making progress. Expect to occasionally make mistakes.

Everyone in the household must be consistent and work with the dog. Children need to be monitored to ensure their safety and to make sure they don’t tease the dog or teach it the wrong behavior.

These exercises will help your dog in four ways:

1. By deferring to you for everything it wants, your dog learns to look to you for cues about the appropriateness of its behavior, which, in turn, prevents undesirable behavior.
2. Deferential behaviors can act as a form of time-out, giving your dog a respite from a situation before it gets worse. The dog can learn that if it responds to your request to sit, then you will help it decide what the next best behavior is. This can be a great relief to dogs that are anxious about appropriate responses (*i.e.* all dogs with behavior problems).
3. Deferential behaviors allow your dog to calm down. A sitting dog is less reactive than one that is tearing around. These behaviors allow the dog to couple a verbal cue, a behavior, and the physiologic response (e.g. relaxing while getting a food treat) to that behavior. All this has a calming effect.
4. Deferential behaviors, consistently reinforced, let your dog know what is expected and let it earn positive attention.

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