

The Law of the Jungle – Canid Style

Now this is the Law of the Jungle --
as old and as true as the sky;
For the strength of the Pack is the Wolf,
and the strength of the Wolf is the Pack.

~ Rudyard Kipling, The Jungle Book

While your dog may be many generations removed from his ancestor the wolf, he's still the same species, and it's still a good idea that he follows some "Laws of the Jungle", in this case, the jungle being your living room and the community in which you live. (There's actually some truth in this ... many of my clients, and even myself, who have chosen to live our lives with multiple dogs, report their living rooms often resemble jungles!)

When we begin a training or behavioral modification plan, two of the elements included will be a leadership program and basic obedience. Often, clients are asked to change or modify a behavior that they don't find problematic or perhaps even enjoy. In some cases, they may wonder why they're being asked to do things differently, as it doesn't seem to directly relate to the exact problem or basic obedience training being addressed. A common example is asking owners of dogs that like to cuddle on the couch to have their dog sit and wait to be invited onto the furniture, rather than jumping up on his own accord whenever he chooses. Many people think this about establishing themselves as 'leader of the pack', but that's not really what's happening, not entirely.

As you've read in other Canid literature, pack behavior is very complex and one of the most misunderstood concepts in the training world today. To simplify things for our purposes here, let's think of a pack as a family, with parents, siblings, aunts, uncles and cousins. In families, the parents and adults guide, teach and direct the younger generations, though aunts and uncles defer to the actual parents for the final say. Older siblings and cousins defer to the adults, yet assist in raising new family members. It is this structure that your dog is ready to embrace and understand, but he'll need your help.

As far as how the "Laws of the Jungle" relate to behavioral modification or basic obedience training, let's think of them as part of a *package*, rather than the rules for pack behavior and how to be the pack alpha leader. These guidelines and practices, together with training or behavior modification, are part of a total package that will help your dog understand his place in the family and how the family should function. If you think about it, these 'laws' are present in every family, whether all human, all canine, or a blend, and simply permit pleasant and orderly interaction. Perhaps when we use the term leadership, we should also think of the term "good parenting". Using the following practices will help you become a good parent to your canine companion and ensure a harmonious family.

Welcome to the Jungle!

- 🐾 Nothing in Life is Free. It is perfectly reasonable to ask Dog to ask for the things he wants and do things to earn them. This is an easy concept when we think of things like Dog's supper, his toy, a treat ... but what about other things Dog wants? Petting, to be with you on the couch, a walk, attention, to occupy a certain location? It's amazing how many owners ask that Dog sit before they'll put down his supper dish or give him a cookie, but when Dog nudges in under their hand, they immediately meet Dog's demand and begin petting. Whenever Dog wants something, ask Dog to perform a behavior or make his request by sitting quietly. In addition, Dog must also understand that he may not always get what he wants. If dog shows up while your preparing a roast for dinner and sits to ask for some, he still needs to comply if you say "Dog, settle."



- ❧ Wait and Excuse Me. Dog must learn to wait at doors, stairways, constricted areas such as hallways and before exiting the car until you say “Let’s go”, giving Dog permission to proceed. Dog must also learn to yield to your approach, especially in doorways or stairways. If Dog is lying in a doorway, at the top of the stairs (popular dog hangouts), on the couch, etc., and you say “Excuse Me”, Dog should make way. Again, this isn’t about alphas or leaders going first or having their way, it’s about safety and orderly movement.
- ❧ Dogs Eat Twice a Day. Unless there’s a medical reason to feed more or less often, adult dogs should eat two meals a day. Leaving food down at all times (free feeding) is problematic for many reasons. Puppies should eat three times a day, and unless your vet says otherwise, should probably be allowed to eat as much as they like at each meal. There is a popular misconception that humans should eat first, then dogs, to help establish leadership. (Alphas eat first.) This is categorically untrue on several levels, and research performed at UC Davis, Tufts University and Cornell University has confirmed that feeding dogs prior to humans eating their meal is effective in reducing aggression, fear and destructive tendencies. Dog should have water available to him at all times.
- ❧ The Begets. Calm begets calm, movement begets movement (both in regards to toileting and prey chase), violence begets violence. Maintaining a calm atmosphere in your home, especially when leaving or returning, will help your dog adopt a calm attitude. When leaving or returning, simply say a quiet “see you later” or “hi, pups, I’m home” without fuss or fan fair. Regarding movement, dogs typically need to toilet after eating, after waking up from naps and after play. Fast motion will also get dog to move, as in run or chase, especially after children. Most importantly, harsh physical punishments and violent behavior will teach Dog that these actions are an acceptable part of his family life and culture, and sooner or later, Dog will try them out for himself.
- ❧ Humans Direct Play. You, the human, will decide when play begins and when it ends. With the exception of a chew toy or enrichment toys to keep dog busy during your absence, toys should be offered, played with, then picked up. During training, we’ll discuss appropriate games and play. Picking up toys also helps reduce resource guarding in multi-dog households. Wrestling games or games where Dog is allowed to mouth, jump, climb or stand on people should not be permitted.
- ❧ Enrichment. Dog’s mind needs as much exercise as his body. Choose games and toys that will stimulate Dog mentally. Keep Dog’s breed and what he was bred to do in mind when selecting toys or inventing games and activities. Remember, you decide when enrichment play will begin and end. Dogs that receive proper mental and physical exercise have a much lower tendency to develop problem behaviors and become destructive.
- ❧ Exercise. Dog needs physical exercise each and every day. A tired dog is a good dog. Even if your dog is calm and well behaved, he still needs exercise for his physical well being.
- ❧ The Sacred Chew Toy. Dog should have a safe, healthy chew toy available at all times, preferably several of the same kind in a few locations. Dogs need to chew, not only for mental satisfaction, but to help keep their teeth healthy. A readily available chew target will also save your shoes, couch, the kid’s toys, etc. from a bored dog looking for something to chew. We’ll discuss safe and appropriate chew toys during training.
- ❧ Dog Should be in Collar at All Times. Dog should wear an appropriately fitted flat buckle or snap collar at all times that has his license, rabies tag and ID/contact tag attached. Dog’s ID/contact tag should have only a phone number(s) where you can be reached. Do not include Dog’s name or your address. Have a separate collar or harness for walks. That way, if Dog slips his collar while walking or escapes through an open door, he’s wearing all the information he needs to bring him safely home.
- ❧ Let Dogs Decide for Dogs. In households where there are multiple dogs, they will respect you as the parent or leader, but will form their own social structure, as well. This social structure may be very



complex, dynamic and fluid. For example, one dog may be the 'leader' when it comes to certain toys, another dog when it comes to certain locations; one may direct outdoor play, another indoor play. Sometimes this is very clear, other times it's more subtle. It's good to observe your dogs and understand their canine social structure, however it's not a good idea to interfere unless severe bullying is taking place. If you have multiple dogs, we'll discuss this further during your training session.

- ❗ Trade Ya. Ah, the fair trade law. If Dog hasn't learned out or drop it yet, or even if he has but has something so valuable he won't let it go, don't chase or wrestle him for it. All that does is make for a great game in Dog's mind and reinforce the behavior. In some cases, it could also make Dog angry and damage the trust you've worked so hard to build. Instead, trade Dog for something else. If Dog has found and stolen the shoe you wore to the horse farm (the stinkier the better!), try trading him for his Kong or other favorite toy.
- ❗ Be a Good Citizen. Understand and respect that not everyone loves your dog as much as you do. Make sure people would enjoy meeting your dog before approaching. As with everything else, Dog should learn to ask permission (wait for your okay) before approaching or sniffing other people or dogs. Don't allow Dog to soil or damage others property or person. Teach Dog to greet and treat guests to your home politely. Keep Dog clean and well groomed so he always puts his best paw forward. Last but not least, always clean up after Dog when out and about.

When Pack meets with Pack in the Jungle,
and neither will go from the trail,
Lie down till the leaders have spoken --
it may be fair words shall prevail.

Now these are the Laws of the Jungle,
and many and mighty are they;
But the head and the hoof of the Law
and the haunch and the hump is - Obey!

~ Rudyard Kipling, The Jungle Book