



Boundaries – House Rules

What are Boundaries?

Just as with children, you should set boundaries for your dog. I am not (necessarily) talking about territorial boundaries, although these may be a subset of the boundaries you choose. I am referring to rules, or expectations that your dog must follow or meet to be an acceptable, well-mannered member of your “pack.”

Some examples of boundaries I have set forth in my household include:

1. No dogs on furniture
2. No dogs allowed in the bedrooms
3. No dogs at the dinner table (while eating)
4. No jumping on humans (unless invited to do so)
5. No dogs in the kitchen while preparing dinner
6. No lunging through the front door (must sit before passing through)
7. No excessive barking
8. No pushy or demanding attention-seeking behavior (such as nudging, paw scratching, barking, etc.).

Consistency is the Key

When creating a list of rules or boundaries, be sure to consult with the entire family. All must be in agreement, not just on what the rules are, but that everyone will enforce the rules. Rules must be enforced immediately *every time* – not just when it is convenient. It would be confusing and unfair to do anything less. A consistent approach is the only one that will make sense to the dog.

Be Creative

Enforcing the rules may call for some creativity, especially when you are not around. For example, when teaching my dogs to stay off the couch, I had to put small folding TV dinner stands on the couch while I was out. This is the only way I could ensure that the rule would not be broken in my absence. Of course, I could have crated the dogs (and if they were still puppies, that is exactly what I would have done). But, my dogs had earned the privilege of freedom, and along with freedom comes responsibility and an awareness of the house rules: No dogs on the couch – *even* when I am not around! After a few weeks of putting the tables on the couch to prevent unwanted access, I removed them, left the house, but stuck around the first few times peeking in the window, just to be sure. Indeed, I had to burst through the door, startling the dogs off the couch twice before they gave up.

The Bigger Picture

Besides the practical reasons for having a disciplined household with rules, the dogs benefit from the constant *awareness* that following the rules requires. It will be apparent that you and your human family are to be respected and that they must listen. It makes it clear that the people are *above* the dog in the pack hierarchy, thus minimizing the chances of behavior problems associated with dominance. And, it teaches the dog to *listen* on a daily basis.

If a Dog Oversteps his Bounds...

If a dog oversteps his “bounds” you must not allow it. You may give the dog a correction, such as a verbal “Off!” if he’s jumping up.

You can tell him to “Go!” if he is being too pushy or demanding. It should be clear that you are not there to serve the dog at his every whim.

With a combination of the basic obedience commands, the corrections (Off, Quiet, Leave It) along with the “Go” command, you have the tools you need to enforce the house rules and ensure a well-mannered dog.

Go

The “Go” command is easily taught:

1. Say “go” in a deep voice and point in the direction the dog must go.
2. Escort the dog to the other room (or another place, like a dog bed).
3. If he tries to come back, scare him off. Flail the arms, and run stomping and shouting towards the dog. Escort him back if necessary.
4. After he stays put for a few seconds, release with a happy, “OK!” Bend down and encourage him to return. Give him a treat.
5. Repeat these steps until the dog goes without assistance.
6. Gradually increase the time the dog is required to stay away.

Uses for the “Go” command:

1. When dogs are showing annoying attention-seeking behavior (nudging, pawing, barking, etc.)
2. When at the dinner table
3. When teaching territorial rules (no dogs in bedroom, no dogs in kitchen while cooking, etc.)
4. Whenever you want – you are the pack leader!