

# WOODVALE PARK

## VETERINARY HOSPITAL



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### **DOG – HUMAN HEIRACHY** ***WHEN IS A DOG REALLY MAN'S BEST FRIEND?***

Dogs quickly become members of our family and much loved companions. This is rightly so as dogs are social animals whose ancestors lived in packs – hunting, sleeping and playing together. It is this sociable nature that leads our pets to enjoy our company and show delight when we return, even after a short absence.

However, it is important for us as owners to appreciate how a pet dog relates to his human pack. The canine pack is not a democratic group, it is unfair being dominated by one or two individuals. A pecking order is established where every individual knows his place. In the home the dog assesses his position in the family pack. It is important that he considers all humans to be his leaders. If he feels dominant to them he may literally bite the hand that feeds him. The dominant dog is like some people – normally friendly but occasionally unpleasant. The dog that suddenly becomes aggressive when asked to move off a favourite armchair is a typical example. Many owners ignore this dominant behaviour thinking that their dog has a “Jekyll and Hyde” personality. However, there are a number of dangers involved with ignoring such behaviour. Your pet may begin to control you more than you would wish.

Early socialisation and training of the dog as a puppy is very important in teaching him that humans are his master. However, many people miss out on this part of their companion's life and must establish dominance later.

Not all dogs are equally dominant. Just like people it depends their type and temperament. Some dogs want to be led and will happily accept you as the boss, while others are more assertive. As in the pack society, the more dominant a dog becomes, the less tolerant it will be. This increases the likelihood of aggression if the dog feels upset or that its position in the group is being threatened.

When assessing the likelihood that your dog may become dominant, it is important to bear in mind the following points:

1. Certain breeds tend to be more dominant than others. This includes large guarding breeds such as Rottweilers and Dobermans, but is often seen in breeds such as Yorkshire Terriers and Jack Russells.
2. Males tend to be more dominant than females. Entire males are more dominant than desexed males.
3. Dominant dogs are often confident, strong willed, cheeky characters.
4. They are inclined to be slow to obey, and rarely or never take up a submissive posture such as rolling onto their backs.

Whenever you interact with your dog you should maintain your dominance. This does not mean exercising a ‘reign of terror’. It is the subtle things that count. Physical punishment is not necessary and is often counter-productive. In the wild, the top dog does not maintain its rank through a constant display of aggression towards the underdogs. Instead, on a daily basis the rest of the pack shows deference towards the leader, avoiding eye contact and obeying the pack rules. It is important that we show our high rank that a dog can understand.

1. Keep height advantage. Preferably do not allow your dog to sit on chairs as this brings him up to your height and level. If you want your dog to sit on your lap, make sure he does it on your terms – do not allow him to jump on your lap when he wants to, he must only come up when invited.
2. Do not allow your dog to ‘bully’ you for attention. He must learn to sit quietly when you are busy. Dog not always stroke him when he wants.
3. Make sure your commands are obeyed. It is better not to command in situations when you know the dog will defy you and you are unable to do anything about it.
4. Do not play tug-of-war games unless you always win!
5. Do not play ‘rough & tumble’ with your dog. Controlled games such as sit and fetch are better.
6. Practice obedience commands every day ; sit, down, stay and come. The “down” position is particularly important, as this is a submissive posture that indicates the dog respects you. Roll your dog over onto his back and tickle his tummy. Ask the dog to obey an obedience command before he earns any privilege such as being stroked or fed.
7. Your dog should not be allowed to pull on the lead. Your dog should walk with you and not pull through doorways. If he does this, e.g. at your front door, make him sit before the door and walk ahead of him into the house. Then call him to you. Make the dog move out of your way when you move about the house, do not always step around him.
8. Groom your dog regularly, whether he needs it or not.

Keeping to these guidelines will help you to remain the pack leader and gain the respect of your dog. Obviously some dogs require specialist handling and these are best left in the hands of experts. Remember to be consistent. Keep to these rules and you and your pet should develop a close, healthy relationship.

Remember your dog may exhibit some human characteristics, but he is a dog and you should show your respect by treating him as such.