



*Canine Consultants*  
**Barry Greenstein**  
**Denise Greenstein**

**(949) 285-8804**  
***cidenise@cox.net***

---

## **Establishing and Keeping the Alpha Position**

### **Introduction**

A dog's social system has a ranking order of authority that determines how a dog relates to other members of his pack. The leader of the pack is the "alpha." He (or she) gets the best of everything - the best food, the best place to sleep, the best toy, etc. The alpha also gets to be first in everything - he (or she) gets to eat first, to leave first and to get attention first. All the other dogs in the pack respect the alpha dog's wishes. An alpha dog doesn't ask for what he wants, he demands it. He lets you know in no uncertain terms that he wants his dinner, that he wants to go out, that he wants to play or be petted and that he wants these things right now.

Your family is your dog's pack. Most dogs fit easily into the lower levels of their human pack's pecking order and don't make trouble. They follow commands and don't challenge authority. Other dogs don't fit in quite as well. Some are natural leaders; others are social climbers always looking for ways to get a little closer to the top of the family ladder. These dogs can become problems to an unsuspecting family that's not aware of their natural pack instincts. Some families unknowingly encourage their dogs to take over the pack. They treat their dogs as equals, not as subordinates. They give them special privileges like being allowed to sleep on the bed or couch. They let them get away with disobeying commands. In a real dog pack, only the alpha dog would get this kind of treatment.



**Canine Consultants**  
**Barry Greenstein**  
**Denise Greenstein**

**(949) 285-8804**  
**[cidenise@cox.net](mailto:cidenise@cox.net)**

---

Dogs need - and want - leaders. They have an instinctive need to fit into a pack. They want the security of knowing their place and what's expected of them. Most of them don't want to be alpha - they want someone else to give orders and make decisions. But if his humans don't provide that leadership, the dog will take over the role himself. A dog that steals food from human hands has no respects for the human, and therefore do not see them as pack leader. A dog who questions his place in the household pack can sometimes cause him to suddenly display destructive behaviors, as the dog is confused and taking his anxiety out on your house.

To reclaim your family's rightful place as leaders of the pack, your dog needs to learn how to be a subordinate, not an equal. He knew this once, as a baby puppy, because his mother taught him. She showed him very early in life that she was alpha and that he had to respect her. It's time to refresh his memory! Before you can remove your dog from his alpha position, you must become alpha and earn his respect. Alpha is an attitude. It involves confidence, dignity, intelligence, an air of authority. A dog can sense this attitude almost immediately - it's how his mother acted toward him.

If your dog has been used to getting what he wants on demand, it's likely to take more than just a change in your attitude to make him mind better. He's been getting a free ride for a long time but you're going to teach him that from now on, he has to earn what he gets. This will be a shock to his system at first but you'll be surprised how quickly he'll catch on and that he'll actually become eager to please you.

If your alpha program is successful, your dog should start looking to you for directions and permission. He'll show an eagerness to please. Watch how your dog approaches



**Canine Consultants**  
**Barry Greenstein**  
**Denise Greenstein**

**(949) 285-8804**  
***cidenise@cox.net***

---

and greets you. A dog that accepts humans as superiors will approach you with his head slightly lowered and his ears back or off to the sides. He'll "shrink" his whole body a little in a show of submission. Watch how he greets all the members of the family. If he displays this submissive posture to some of them, but not others, those are the ones who need to work harder on their own alpha techniques.

A well-trained dog that's secure in his place within the family pack is comfortable and confident. He knows what's expected of him. He knows his limits and who his leaders are. He's free to be your loving companion and not your boss!

Dogs need to have a clear place in their pack. A dog who knows his place in his human pack is a happy dog. While a dog lacking in this clear order is an unhappy dog and confused dog and can exhibit many unwanted behaviors (aggression, separation anxiety, destructive behaviors, growling at humans, or guards' food with growl) because of it.

#### The Pack Leader

Below is a list of rules every dog owner should follow to ensure your dog knows he is subordinate, not an equal to all humans in the pack. Your dog needs to look at you and other humans in the household as the Pack Leader.

(If your dog guards his food, or growls at humans in the family, these rules should be strictly followed)

1. When you put his food dish down, he must wait until you give the "OK" to eat it. Place his food on the ground and tell him to wait. If he darts at the food, block him with your body. You can point at him and



**Canine Consultants**  
**Barry Greenstein**  
**Denise Greenstein**

**(949) 285-8804**  
**cidenise@cox.net**

---

tell him, "Wait" however do not speak much. Dogs are, for the most part, silent communicators. They feel one another's energy and your dog can feel yours. Yes, your dog can read your emotions. So stand tall and think "Big" and stay confident. Do not be nervous, your dog will sense this and assume you as weak. It is this weakness that triggers a dog to try and take over (for the good of the pack, the pack needs a strong leader). Give the dog a command before giving them their food. If a dog does not follow the command (i.e. to sit), he does not eat. Try again in about 10 minutes or longer. Repeat this until the dog listens to the command. When your dog calms down and waits patiently, (ears set back, head lowered even slightly, laying down is good if he is relaxed with his ears back) invite him to eat his food. Members of the pack that are not considered alpha by the dog should feed the dog the majority of the time to earn respect from the dog.

2. All humans must eat **before** the dog, because the leader always eats first. Prior to you giving your dog its food do one of two things while he is watching; eat a small snack first, or lay the snack near the dog food so that he thinks you are eating out of his bowl by pretending to eat the food from the dog's food bowl.
3. No table scraps should ever be fed to the dog during a meal.



*Canine Consultants*  
**Barry Greenstein**  
**Denise Greenstein**

**(949) 285-8804**  
***cidenise@cox.net***

---

4. Feedings must be at a scheduled time. (No self feeding dog food dispensers nor should food be left out in the dogs bowl to allow your dog to graze, as this allows the dog to choose when he eats.)
5. Humans must not let the dog go through any doorway first, or up or down the stairs first. Dogs must always go through the doorways or up and down stairs *after* the humans, because the leader of the pack always goes first. If the dog does not stay behind the human, the dog must be told to "**wait**" and given the command to "**come**" after all humans have passed through.
6. When you have left the house or the room, even for a minute and come back in the room, ignore the dog for a few minutes. This reinforces the status of leader since "Alpha dogs" come and go as they please.
7. A simple obedience command such as "**Sit**" should be given before any pleasurable interaction with the dog. (i.e. play session, petting, feeding or a walk etc...) Any children in the pack should give the dog commands at least once a day and reward with a treat when the command is followed. A simple "**Sit**" will do. No treat should be awarded if the dog does not follow the command. Show your dog he does not get anything for free. His food, water, treats, even praise/love have to be earned by doing something. Even something as little as sit



*Canine Consultants*  
**Barry Greenstein**  
**Denise Greenstein**

**(949) 285-8804**  
***cidenise@cox.net***

---

- or come. Make sure the dog takes the treat from your hands gently.  
Do not tolerate a mouthy dog.
8. Do not interpret your puppy's behavior in human terms, dogs think differently than humans ("If you treat your dog as a human then he (or she) will treat you as a dog").
  9. You are the one who greets newcomers first, the dog is the last who gets attention (the pack leader is the one who greets newcomers and lets the rest know when it is safe to greet the newcomer)
  10. If a dog is laying in your path, do not walk around the dog, or step over the dog ask the dog to move.
  11. During the time you are establishing your higher pack position, no hugs should be given to the dog by you, as a dominant dog may consider this a challenge of power.
  12. If you establish eye contact with the dog, the dog must avert his gaze first. If the human averts first this reinforces the dogs higher power position. Any children in the pack should be asked **Not** to have staring contest with the dog, as if they avert or blink first, since it will only reinforce, in the dogs mind, that *He* (or she) is **Top Dog**.



**Canine Consultants**  
**Barry Greenstein**  
**Denise Greenstein**

**(949) 285-8804**  
**[cidenise@cox.net](mailto:cidenise@cox.net)**

---

13. Dogs must not sleep in your bed. The comfortable bed is reserved for the higher humans. If you just can't be without your dog in the bed, at the very least you need to make sure he sleeps at the foot of the bed. A doggie bed on the floor beside you is your best bet for maintaining Alpha position (this rule is for dogs showing signs they are forgetting their place). A pet that is well behaved, obedient and truly considers you as the alpha of the pack can only be invited by you to sleep next to you or your child. The same goes for sleeping on furniture.
  14. Dogs must never be allowed to mouth or bite anyone at any time, including in play. Use the loud “yip” sound to discourage this behavior.
  15. Any attention given to the dog, including petting should be given when the *Human* decides attention is to be given (absolutely *No Petting* when the dog nudges or paws you or your hand. This would be letting the dog decide and reinforce, in his mind, that he is higher on the scale than the human.)
  16. Games of fetch or play with toys must be *Started* and *Ended* by the *Human*. Tug-of-war is a game of power and you may lose the game giving the dog reinforcement (in the dog's mind) of top dog. Thus if you play the power game tug-of-war you or any human must win “80% to 90% of the time. Give the “out” command and place the toy out of reach of the dog until next play time.
-



**Canine Consultants**  
**Barry Greenstein**  
**Denise Greenstein**

**(949) 285-8804**  
**[cidenise@cox.net](mailto:cidenise@cox.net)**

---

17. Very dominate dogs who have a problem with growling should not be allowed to lie on your furniture, since the leader of the pack always gets the most comfortable spot.
18. If you do decide to allow your dog on the furniture, you must be the one who decides when he is allowed up and you must be the one who decides when he is to get off, by inviting him and telling him to get off.
19. Dogs need to be taught a release command (“Drop it” or “Out”). Any objects the dog has in his possession should be able to be taken away by all humans easily.
20. Dogs own no possessions, everything belongs to the humans. They are all on "loan" from the human family. You should be able to handle or remove any item at all times from the dog with no problems from the dog. Even if you are taking a meat bone out of the dog's mouth.
21. Dogs should not be allowed to pull on the leash. When they do this they are leading the way and it is the humans that need to lead the way and show they're higher up in the pack order. (In the wild, the leader of the pack always leads the hunt.)
22. When on a walk, the dog must walk beside you, or behind you, never in front of you, as the leader always leads the way. A dog must not be allowed to sniff or eliminate anywhere he wishes. Only one mark



**Canine Consultants**  
**Barry Greenstein**  
**Denise Greenstein**

**(949) 285-8804**  
**cidenise@cox.net**

---

- against a tree is enough for male dogs. All dogs should be taken out daily for a walk.
23. Small dogs or puppies who demand to be picked up or put down should **Not** get what they want until they sit or do another acceptable quiet behavior. They should not be put down unless they are settled quietly in your arms.
  24. Dogs should **Never** be left unsupervised with children or *anyone* who cannot maintain leadership over the dog.
  25. To reinforce your position even more, you can make your dog lay down and stay there, building up to 5 to 10 minutes a day. Tell him to lay down, and then tell him to stay. If he tries to get up, correct him.
  26. Do not let your dog walk through the door first. If your dog always goes ahead of you, you need to get your leash on him and open the door. If he rushes ahead you pull him back and tell him "**No wait**" and then you walk through and then give him permission to come follow. This can be accomplished easier and faster if you have someone help you with this behavior at first.
  27. If a dog is constantly leaning on you, putting his paw on you, or touching you in some way, this is not your dog loving you, it is your dog displaying dominate behaviors. In the dog world, space is respect. A dog that is



**Canine Consultants**  
**Barry Greenstein**  
**Denise Greenstein**

**(949) 285-8804**  
**[cidenise@cox.net](mailto:cidenise@cox.net)**

---

constantly nudging you and leaning on you, is not only disrespecting you, they are being the alpha dog. You are the one who must start and end touching and affection. Affection should only be given when the dog is being calm and submissive. Never when the dog is excited, anxious, scared, nervous etc... or you will be reinforcing that state in the dog.

28. When you are around your dog avoid emotions such as fear, anxiety, harshness or nervousness. Your dog can sense these emotions and will see you as weak. This will escalate your problem as your dog feels an even stronger need to be your leader. Think Big and Powerful and be calm, assertive, and consistent. Remember, there is no hiding our emotions from our dogs. They can in a sense, read our minds by reading our emotions. This energy is the universal language of animals. Talk less, using more body language. Picture yourself, in your own mind as big, powerful and very sure of yourself.

Pull your shoulders back and stand up straight. Your dog will feel this. This is your number one resource when it comes to communicating with your dog. Your dog will be happy and secure knowing he has a strong pack leader to care for him.

## **In Conclusion**

By incorporating all or most of these behaviors in his normal day your dog will realize that he is subordinate, not an equal you and that you are alpha of the pack (Pack



**Canine Consultants**  
**Barry Greenstein**  
**Denise Greenstein**

**(949) 285-8804**  
**[cidenise@cox.net](mailto:cidenise@cox.net)**

---

Leader). Remember; spend time with your dog. Train him, be calm, assertive and provide rules and boundaries your dog must follow. When you provide all of those things, play with him and love him. Just as a child looks to his parents for guidance and boundaries, so does your dog. Sometimes we have to use tough love, but in the long run, you and your dog will be happier if you maintain the Alpha (Pack Leader) role. Obedience exercises and classes are great and very useful; however, obedience training alone does not address pack behavior problems. Obedience training is a lifelong process that teaches your dog commands. Obedience commands need to be practiced and incorporated into your daily life. In a dog pack, the alpha animal uses occasional reminders to reinforce his authority. Certain commands, like DOWN/STAY, are especially effective reminders of a dog's place in the family pack order and who's really in charge.