

Ask the Dogcatcher

LCAS's Kylie B. answers all your dog and cat questions
BY KYLIE BELACHAIKOVSKY

I have a pit bull puppy, and I am making sure she is a model citizen. When she acts dominant towards people or other dogs (like biting or jumping on them), I show her it's not OK by grabbing her, rolling her over and making her stay there until I say she can get up. My friend the drama queen says I'm totally abusing her and that she should call animal control. Who's out of line here?

I'm Just Dog Whispering

Here is the official short answer: No, your actions do not fall under the definition of animal abuse, my wanna-be-dog-whispering friend.

I'm more than a little worried, though. I'm worried about the unintended results of using the "alpha roll" technique you described. Dude, even Wikipedia recognizes this as an obsolete and dangerous training tool. Seriously. I understand that you probably think you are mimicking a mamma-dog or a wolf pack, but decades of real research have proven those theories to be bunk science. The real problem is that "leaders" who use punishment and intimidation are doing nothing to teach their dogs how they *should* behave. At best, your pup will actually figure out that normal jumping and playing behaviors lead to punishment, so she will suppress the urge to jump and play-bite. It is just as likely that your dog will learn that when visitors and new dogs come around, you behave in a rude, scary way, and so visitors are also scary and should be avoided.

You can still be a nonviolent "alpha leader" of your pack by controlling the resources your dog wants. Your pup wants attention, and she wants to play, and she is showing perfectly normal dog behavior by excitedly jumping up on new people (or dogs) and mouthing them.

So, try this: When your little darling jumps up for attention, simply turn your back to her. Wait for those adorable little paws to hit the ground, and REWARD her with a treat or praise. Better yet, show her an even better greeting behavior, like sitting politely. What I am saying here is: Don't just punish her for what she does wrong. Show her what you'd like her to do, and make sure you reward her every time



she does it. Pretty soon you will have both a model citizen and a dog that views you as a fair leader, not an intimidating bully.

Dog Whisperer, picture a mom and kid at the grocery store. The kid is crying because she wants candy at the checkout. Mom grabs her daughter by the shoulders and pins her against the wall, and with her face inches from the kids, verbally threatens her until she finally stops crying. Would you call this "Child Whispering" or child abuse? Did the child learn how to be better behaved or learn that the sooner she submits to bullying, the sooner the terror ends? There is a better way to teach! Modern, scientific methods that use positive reinforcement work better, and they build bonds based on trust instead of fear and intimidation. Not convinced yet? Check out the fabulous training tips at one of my favorite websites, www.clickertraining.com 

Email Kylie with your questions at letters@eugeneweekly.com



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