

Dog Training Articles
By Beth Bradley

Train with your dog using your Head not your Heart

When training your dog it is most important to step out of the role of parent and step into the role of teacher and rule maker. Dogs are guided by instincts not emotions. They do not look to a kind and loving Alpha pack member but rather a strong and dominant leader who is guided by his or her head and makes decisions based on what is good for the pack as a whole.

The Whelping of Puppies:

As the puppies are being born, the mother dog or “Dam” is the one who cleans and makes sure each puppy is breathing. She licks each puppy to stimulate the puppy to breathe on its own. From the naked human eye, we think she is showing affection and caring; on the contrary, she wants to get that puppy breathing and prepare the puppy to breathe on its own before the next set of contractions begin. A Dam will work on trying to get a puppy to breathe until the next set of contractions start. If that puppy is not breathing by the time the next is born she pushes him or her aside knowing that she hopefully has a healthy one to care for and help to breathe.

A Mother’s “Love”:

The Dam’s job is to protect her puppies, feed her puppies and make decisions based on the whole rather than the individual. It is common for a Dam to push a weak puppy aside and not feed it. She may refuse to feed it because it is sick or there is a genetic defect. She does this because it is more important for her to feed strong puppies that can survive on their own then to waste food (milk) on a puppy that is weak or has a genetic defect, which is making it sickly.

At first, I too thought this was horrible of the Dam and have stepped in to help. I, the human, allowed my emotions to take control of my head and more often than not the weak puppy would die anyway, despite my efforts. The Dam was not emotional when she pushed this puppy aside; she was ‘matter of fact’.

Also, the Dam doesn’t have a ‘favorite puppy’; each youngster is treated with the same fair, firm and consistent leadership. The Dam knows her job is to raise healthy puppies that eat, play and are emotionally stable. A Dam does not allow instability nor does she condone instability by constantly cooing and caressing. The Dam begins to take short breaks from the litter so they learn to separate themselves from her and emotionally deal with short periods of stress. Amazingly, the puppies never go through separation anxiety from her!

A Puppy’s New Home

I have been asked so often about what the Dam feels when the puppies begin to leave and go into their new homes; the answer, she feels nothing. My females have always been so happy to get back to training that they don't even look twice when a puppy leaves. So often, the puppies come back to training with me and my females may show interest and smell their puppies but it is the puppy that is happier to see his or her "mom".

Imitate the Dam not a Human Mother:

Don't concern yourself with becoming your dog's playmate or friend. Treat your dog the way its real mother or 'dam' would. The Dam does her job. The Dam is not overly affectionate. The Dam doesn't constantly talk or praise the puppies. As a pack leader you must shed your human emotional side and treat your dog in the same manner they are used to being treated. The Dam sets boundaries with her puppies and teaches them control versus giving affection. The Dam does not treat the puppies with talk or praise, she demands respect by her mere presence.

Speaking or Commanding too often leads to Emotional Stress:

It is not necessary to verbally praise a dog; sometimes my clients are constantly praising their dogs for everything. Some dogs do need verbal encouragement but some dogs cannot handle any form of praise, as they will begin to lose focus and control of themselves emotionally. I have had clients tell me that they can't get their dogs to walk over street grates or under over hangs. I then ask to see the behavior and when the dog starts bucking like a bronco they begin to praise and give food.

What they are doing is rewarding the stressful behavior. In those instances think about what the Dam would do, she would keep walking and leave the puppy behind. The puppy is showing the 'Dam' that it is emotionally sick, and the Dam would cast away a sick puppy. Now, you shouldn't leave your dog on the street but I would suggest moving over the grate or under the overhang, no words, no commands, no praise, shoulders and head forward and without stopping or hesitating keep going – IT WILL WORK!

Conclusion:

Your dog is happiest when he has an Alpha to provide him with firm, fair and consistent leadership. As pack leader you need to set boundaries (training), enforce the rules of the house (training), feed, water and make sure your dog receives physical stimulation in the form of exercise. If you are a teacher, treat your puppy like a child in your class, if you are a CEO treat your dog like an employee, if you are a Doctor, treat your dog like a patient, if you are an Attorney, treat your client like he is your adversary. Get what you want from your dog without emotional entanglements and when your dog is finally emotionally stable, show praise and affection. The affection makes you feel better; the dog doesn't real care either way.