

Protocol for deference: Basic Program

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Dogs have social systems that are very similar to those of humans. They live in extended family groups, they have extensive and extended parental care, will work as a group or a family to help care for the offspring, nurse their young prior to feeding them semi-solid, then solid, food, use play as one form of developing social skills, communicate extensively vocally or non-vocally, and –most importantly—dogs have a social system that is based on deference to others and that governs different roles in different contexts.

Fights for status or control are notoriously **rare** among wild canids, including wolves. Except in what humans perceive to be abnormal social conditions, most human social relations are structured by negotiation and deference to others, rather than by violence. Deference-structured hierarchies mean that the individual to whom others defer may differ depending on the social circumstances. Status and circumstances are not absolute. In the human situation, a child may defer to his parents' requests, but then be the leader on the playground to whom other children defer. Dogs are similar.

Much has been written about dogs viewing their human families as their packs. It's important to remember that "pack" is just a word to describe a canid social grouping, like "pod" described a group of whales, and "gaggle" describes a group of geese. The problem for our dogs is that there is a value judgment within the word. Humans have wrongly attributed a value structure and judgment to the word "pack" and then assumed dogs viewed us as part of theirs. While the pack comparison is not exact, dogs are social and generally will look to their people for guidance. Dogs often become problems when they cease to do this, or if they never do this, or if they cannot do this. **The protocol for Deference** is the first step in both **preventing** problems associated with a lack of guidance and in **treating** all forms of behavioral problems. The keys to this program are simple:

- The dog must attend to the humans for signals
- The dog must relax when he or she does so
- The human must be clear in his or her signals
- The human must be reliable, reasonable, and humane.

All social animals create some form of rule structure. While cats have very different social systems than do dogs and people, it's that rule structure that allows cats to respond to this program, as well as dogs, although it is primarily written for dogs. The rule structure is what allows all social animals to communicate with each other. Clear communication is essential in social animals because it avoids an inefficient and potentially dangerous use of time (e.g. fighting). Because dogs are so similar to us in so many ways, and so frequently look like they are hanging on our every word, we assume that they are complying with our rule structure and all its nuances. Puppies actually need guidance in how to do this, and

problem dogs need to have consistent, benign, kind rule structure explicitly spelled out for them: if the dog knows a consistent rule or behavior that will get the attention of their people, they will then be receptive to guidance. This is a form of discipline. People often confuse discipline and violence or abuse. **This program MUST be executed without violence or physical abuse**, or you will earn your pet's distrust. In fact, for most dogs, withdrawal of attention is a far more profound correction than is physical abuse. Abused dogs, or those consistently mismanaged with physical punishment, will either learn to override the punishment, or learn to seek it, since it may be the most common contact that they get.

Physical punishment includes: leash or collar "corrections" using a "choke" collar or a prong collar, hitting the dog, walking the dog into a pole or tree to make him pay attention, and tying the dog so that he cannot move. If these punishment techniques sound abusive, it's because most often they are. The true definition of punishment doesn't require pain: it requires a stimulus sufficiently powerful that the dog with the subsequent result abandons the undesirable behavior that the probability of the dog exhibiting the behavior **in the future** is lowered. The emphasized parts of this sentence are important because unless these conditions are met the dog is not being 'punished'-they're being injured mentally and, perhaps, physically. By far, the more favorable way to handle undesirable behaviors-and we have to remember that we, as humans, have taste preferences that are different from those of dogs-is to prevent them. If they cannot or were not prevented, rather than punishing the dog we should ignore the behaviors and so withdraw any attention associated with them. Finally we should be clear to the dog and tell the dog what behaviors **will** get the dog attention. It's utterly unfair to the dog to have him try and 'guess' what it is that will get you to stop yelling at him and start loving him, yet these are the circumstances to which many dogs are reduced. These 3 steps are what practicing deference is all about.

The intent of this program is to set a baseline of good behavioral interaction between the client and dog, and to teach the dog that if he or she consistently is calm, quiet, attentive and defers to his or her people, attention and rewards will follow. In turn, the people learn to have realistic expectations for their pet and to signal clearly, calmly, and kindly to their pet. This protocol also gives the clients permission to **not** be angry at the dog-instead, they can walk away. To have a great relationship with your pet you do **not** have to control their every move. The best dog-human relationships are the ones where clear signaling is involved- and good play almost guarantees this- and ones where both dogs and human's needs are respected and met.

These goals are accomplished in a safe, kind, passive manner, and is tougher to do than clients frequently acknowledge. The reason for this is as follows: if the clients are talking, reading, or watching TV and the dogs comes up to them and rubs, paws, or leans against them, the clients usually passively reach out and touch or pet the dog. The dog controlled the entire interaction. The traditional way to view this is to see it as a contest with a score as: dog, 1; human, 0. While it is true that the people didn't even know that there were any

signals other than affection to the dog being conveyed, they need to consider another factor. It is absolutely true that the humans allowed the dog to control the interaction and that the dog learned that if he or she was persistent that could get attention, regardless. However... something more important happened here. If the dog is uncertain, anxious, concerned, or worried about the rules of the interaction... getting attention from the people in this context made it worse. Humans need to understand that they are **always** signaling to the dog whether they intend to or not and that dogs read non-verbal signaling better than people do. Given this, humans must assess if their response is rewarding the behavior that they think it is. Here's a hint: if the dog is getting peskier or more worried, the human is not reading the signaling situation correctly. Putting their butt on the ground for just a second and looking at the human can achieve this objective.

Under no circumstances can the clients touch, love or otherwise interact with the dog unless the dog defers and awaits their attention. This is not about "control" or "mastery" of the dog-its about increasing the chance that you can signal clearly to the dog and that you have the dog's undivided attention while signaling. Because dogs naturally defer to other dogs by sitting or lying down and looking at them, we can have them defer to us and ready to take their cues from our signals by having the dog sit.

The sit does not have and have to be and should not be prolonged. It can be short as seconds as long as the dog's butt is on the ground and the dog is looking quietly at the person. Even a 5-week-old puppy can sit-butt flush to the ground for a few seconds-and look at you, even if they are wiggle worms. Pups can even learn to sit and attend to the client (look at them for cues, make eye contact, look happy and attentive while being quiet) in exchange for a food treat. As soon as the puppy sits, the person should say "Good girl (boy)!" and give a tiny treat of something special. Special means that the treat is not something they get everyday. Dog biscuits and kibble aren't just fabulous enough to warrant extra effort in most cases. Extra-special dog biscuits, tiny pieces of cheese, et cetera can...think about it...how quickly would you do something if you were offered \$1 million compared to \$10? Well, the currency for dogs is access to you and your love. So as soon as their butt is on the ground, praise and pet the pup, tell him he is brilliant, and give the treat.

For a dog that already knows how to sit the only problem is going to be to reinforce this for **everything** that the dog wants. The rule is: the dog must sit and be quiet-and-this is the essential part-look to you and attend to you for cues about whether their behavior is appropriate-in order to have access to **anything** and **everything** he or she wants for the rest of his or her life! This includes sitting for:

- Food and feeding,
- Treats,
- Love,
- Grooming
- Being able to go out—or come in
- Having the leash, halter or harness put on

- Having his or her feet toweled
- Being **invited** onto the bed or sofa (if desired)
- Playing games
- Playing with toys
- Having a tick removed
- Having a wound checked
- Being petted or loved
- Attention
- ANYTHING THE DOG WANTS!

All the dog has to do is to put his or her bottom on the floor or ground, be quiet, look at the person, and await praise and treat that signals to the dog that their person thinks that the dog's calm behavior is brilliant. This takes, literally, seconds, but its value is inestimable. Deference provides dogs with a rule that allows them to seek, and then take, guidance and help. **All** dogs should learn this and **no** dog is too old to learn this.

If the dog is older or arthritic, he or she might be more comfortable lying down. All puppies should be raised using this simple, but powerful deference behavior. This **will not** take away a dog's spunk, fire or individuality. It **will** allow the client to have a far better relationship with the dog and to control the dog. This good relationship is critical if the dog is about to put itself in a potentially injurious position, like jumping out of the car in a parking lot. Also, people notice that when they don't have to struggle with the dog to get into or out of the house, when they don't get mauled while feeding the dog, and when they can regain their space on the sofa or bed just by asking the dog to come to them and sit, life with dogs is pleasurable, instead of a struggle.

What do deferential behaviors and the **Protocol for deference** do to treat or prevent problem behaviors?

1. Sitting and deferring for everything the dog wants, forever, reinforces the innate social structure of the dog and teaches him or her to look to his or her people for cues about the appropriateness of his or her behavior.
2. Deferential behaviors can act as a form of mini "time out": they give the dog respite from a situation so that it does not have to get worse. The dog can learn that if he or she responds to a person's request to sit, that the person will help him or her decide what the next best behavior is. This is a great relief to dogs that are anxious about appropriate responses (i.e., many dogs with behavioral problems)
3. Deferential behaviors allow the dog to calm down. A sitting dog is less reactive than one that is tearing around, so these behaviors allow the dog to couple a verbal cue, a behavior and the physiological response to that behavior. All of this will have a calming effect.
4. Deferential behaviors, consistently reinforced, will allow the dog to anticipate what is expected, and to be able to **earn** attention. This is a very humane rule structure.

Points to Remember:

1. Starting immediately, the dog must ask for everything that he or she wants for the rest of his or her life, if you do not automatically meet the dog's wishes and needs. The dog does this by quietly sitting and staying for a few moments (deferring to you).
2. The dog is requested to sit by using his or her name and then saying, "Sit". The dog's name and a request to sit can be repeated every 3-5 seconds as needed. This is **not** an obedience class exercise-by using your dog's name and repeating your request if the dog is paying attention to you, you will reassure the dog. Please do not think that if the dog does not comply with your every wish instantaneously that he or she is being "defiant"-your relationship with your pet does not have to and shouldn't be an adversarial one...the dog may just need time to become calm enough to sit, or the dog may be confused about what you really want because of past interactions. Some dogs are so shocked that they can actually be praised for just sitting and being calm that the idea takes a little getting used to. **Give the dog the mental space he or she needs to attend to and respond to you.**
3. If the dog resists or refuses to comply or acts confused or anxious---**walk away from the dog**. The dog will eventually follow you. When the dog appears or demands attention, ask him or her to sit as prescribed above. If the dog resists---**walk away from the dog**. Sooner or later this dog will capitulate. Outlast the dog. Do not use the dog's lack of compliance as an excuse to get angry: the dog's intent is likely not to make you angry-the dog may not be able to perform the request yet because of anxiety or fear. If you persist in calm, clear instructions the dog's behavior will change.
4. As soon as the dog sits, reward him or her with praise. A food reward will hasten the process for a dog that doesn't know how to sit. The next step is to teach the dog "stay" (See protocol for teaching "sit", "stay", and "come"). Please remember that the dog must stay until released. Since the point of this protocol is to enforce deference that is generalizable, quick releases are desired. Later, if you wish, you can practice long stays and downs as part of an overall relaxation and behavior modification program (See protocol for relaxation: Behavior modification Tier 1). This protocol is a necessary part of the treatment program for dogs with true behavior problems.
5. Watch for subtle, pushy, defiant, anxious, uncertain behaviors that the dog may exhibit. Expect that you and the dog will occasionally make mistakes---don't fight with the rest of the family about it. This will not help the dog. Expect to be a little frustrated. Remember---dogs read body language far better than you do and they are watching you all the time. They could be watching for an opportunity to escape or for a signal from you that tells them if they have to worry. Use that watchful behavior, and shape it into using more deferential behaviors
6. Please remember that everyone in the household must be consistent and work with the dog. Children need to be monitored to ensure their safety and to help them to not teach the dog the wrong behavior. Children must understand the difference between

a food salary and a bribe and **must** be taught not to tease the dog. Dangling food out in front of a dog at a distance is an invitation to get up and lunge. Everyone must return to the dog to reward him or her, tell him or her to stay, and quickly couple verbal praise with the food treat that should magically appear on an unfolded, flat hand.

7. Reward the dog. This should be fun---for everyone.

Note the following

1. You use the dog's name—this will get her to attend to you. You can use it frequently, unlike in obedience, as long as she does attend to you. In fact, her name should be her cue to orient towards you. If she doesn't look at you immediately, put the treat near your eye. You need her to focus
2. Repeat the request after a few seconds if the dog is not paying attention to you. Again, this is not obedience—the dog needs your reassurance. As the dog improves or learns more, you will repeat their request signals less frequently and at greater intervals. Again, this is why those who study learning call a “shaping behavior”: we can learn something by gradually approximating it and being rewarded for progressively closer approximations
3. Reward the dog appropriately. Eventually the food treats will appear less predictably. At the outset the dog needs everything you can do to help him or her.
4. Remember to use one or two words consistently as a releaser (“All done!” “That’s it!”, “Bellissimo!”, et cetera). Then remember that if you use those words while talking to the dog, the dog will get up. If the dog gets up before released, make it stay and stay again, and wait 3-5 seconds before released. This will prevent Jack-in-the-box behavior.
5. Don't expect even the best-behaved dog to be able to pay attention to you, be calm, and respond to your request if pandemonium surrounds the dog. You cannot expect dogs to be fully responsive in stressful, noisy, confusing environments unless they are specifically taught to do so, as are service dogs.

As the dog becomes more experienced and masters staying at a short distance, **gradually** increase the distance between you and the dog. **Do not** go from getting the dog to stay within 1 meter of you to waling across the room. The temptation will be great and all you have done is to provoke conflict and anxiety in the dog. This will defeat your goal. A more detailed approach that reinforces stay is found in the **Protocol for Relaxation: Behavior Modification Tier 1**.

If you would like, you can do this on lead, using a head collar, which would allow you, long-distance to reinforce sitting. Again see the handout on head collars (**Protocol for Choosing Collars, Head collars, and Harnesses**).

A cautionary word on food treats:

Remember, the treats are to be used as a salary or reward---**not as a bribe**. If you bribe a dog or cat you are sunk before you start. **Bribes** come **before** the dog executes the desired

behavior to lure him away from an undesirable behavior; **rewards** come **in exchange** for a desirable behavior. It is often difficult to work with a problem dog that has learned to manipulate bribes, but there are creative ways around this, often involving head collars. First, find a food that the dog likes, and that they do not usually experience. Suggestions include boiled, slivered chicken or tiny pieces of cheese. Boiled, shredded chicken can be frozen in small portions and defrosted as needed. Individually wrapped slices of cheese can be divided into tiny pieces (0.5cm X 0.5cm) suitable for behavior modification through the plastic, minimizing waste and mess. Whatever you choose, the following are guidelines:

1. foods that are high in protein may help induce changes in the brain chemistry that help the dog to relax
2. dogs should not have chocolate because it can be toxic to dogs,
3. some dogs do not do well with treats that contain artificial colors and preservatives
4. dogs with food allergies or those taking drugs that are monoamine oxidase inhibitors may have food restrictions (cheese, for dogs taking MAOIs=Anipryl[®], PrevenTics[®] collars)
5. dog biscuits generally are not sufficient motivation, but some foods are so desirable that the dog is too stimulated by them to relax—you want something in between these two extremes
6. treats should be tiny (less than ½ of a thumbnail) so that the dog or cat does not get full, fat, or bored with them
7. if the dog or cat stops responding to one kind of treat, try another, and
8. do not let treats make up the bulk of the dog's diet—they need their normal, well-balanced ration.

The Reward Process

There is an art to rewarding dogs and cats with food treats. Learning to do so correctly will help the dog or cat focus on exercises and will keep everyone safe. So that the pet does not lunge for the food, keep the already prepared treats in a little cup or plastic bag behind your back, and keep one treat in the hand that you'll use to reward the dog. That hand can then either be kept behind your back so that the dog or cat doesn't stare at the food, or can be moved to your eye so that you can teach the dog to look happy and make eye contact with you. The food treat must be small so that the focus of the dog's attention is not a slab of food, but rather your cues. A treat that is the correct size can be closed in the palm of your hand just by folding it, and will not be apparent when held between thumb and forefingers. When presenting the dog with the treat, bring the hand, with a lightly closed fist, up quickly to the dog (**do not** startle the dog), and turn your wrist to open your hand.

When first starting the program, let the cat- yes, cats can do this, too- or dog smell and taste the reward so that he or she knows what the reward for the work will be. If the dog is too terrified to approach, you can place a small amount of treat on the floor. Then ask the dog to "sit"; if your dog or cat sits instantly, say "Good girl (boy)!" and instantly open your hand to give the pet the treat instantly while saying "stay."

If the dog or cat is too fearful or too aggressive to look at you for any extended period of time without fleeing or lunging, you can still ask them to “look”, but you have to modify how this is done. There are a lot of myths out there about whether you should or should not look at dogs. Ultimately, you need to be able to look at your dog or cat directly- its how all mammals best gauge trust. A few quick tips are useful.

- 1) **Don't** “stare down” dogs. Normal dogs will look away, anyway, if you look scary enough, and troubled dogs will think you are a threat-because you are-and their anxiety or aggression will worsen.
- 2) **Do** look at the dog or cat. Looking someone directly in the eye is the best way to insure that you are communicating well. Looking at a dog is different from staring. When you stare you don't move your eyes, you stiffen your muscles in your face, and your pupils likely dilate. This is a threat. Looking is much more relaxed and is important for clear communication in all mammals with decent eyesight.
- 3) If when you just casually look at the dog or cat he begins to be aggressive-divert your gaze so that you can keep them in view with you peripheral vision, while not making direct eye contact. This will often lessen any aggression. It is always a horrible idea to try to “out-stare” any aggressive animal.

So, if you have an animal who is too worried or aggressive to look at you, raise your hand, with the treat concealed, to your forehead while saying “look” then quickly, but fluidly so that you don't startle or threaten the animal, move your hand down and to the side so that the animal has to turn their head to have the now exposed treat. Do not hold treats in fingertips: this is an invitation to bite. And....if the dog is really a concern or if you don't feel comfortable, after they look, drop the treat to their side but in front of the face so that they can still sit while being rewarded. This trick requires that you have good aim. In any case, as you are rewarding the dog or cat say, “good sit” so that the praise and treat are coupled. This way the praise will later act on its own to reinforce the behavior.

If kittens and puppies are raised with this program most will be delights. For those who will still have problems, the problems will be readily identifiable early on, and recognized because of the change in the pet's otherwise impeccable behavior. Good luck, and enjoy your charmingly behaved companion!