

Respecting your Dog's Boundaries

Imagine you have climbed into bed with a good book, a cup of hot chocolate, and just got comfortable under the covers. Suddenly several family members parade into your room every few minutes to ask you a question or request you do something for them. It would be hard to relax and enjoy your reading time alone and you might even feel angry for being subjected to such rude treatment. Now imagine your dog as he settles into his favorite spot, ready to relax his body after a hard day of being a dog. But everyone who walks by pats him, kisses him, or gives him a brisk belly rub because he looks so cute. There is not much difference between these two scenarios. It is easy to see how constantly disrupting your dog when he is resting might be just as disconcerting for him as the disruption of your reading time is for you.

Since most people expect their dogs to respect their space and boundaries, it's only fair that people do the same in return. If your dog has just settled down to rest by your feet, don't view it as an open invitation to reach down and touch him, kiss him or ruffle up his fur. In fact, this can quickly teach your dog never to relax in your presence. The old adage of "Let sleeping (and resting) dogs lie," is one to live by if you want your dog to learn to relax in your presence.

Did You Know?

You can ask your dog how he feels about being touched. Rather than "having your way" with your dog, you can show your dog the boundary respect he deserves by using an "ask and release" system. Anytime you would like to touch or pet your dog, "ask" first by reaching out and touching him for a couple of seconds, and then "release" by moving your hand away. Once you have done that, watch your dog's reactions after being touched—did your dog get wild and escalate his behavior, possibly whining, pawing, jumping, or nipping at you? Did he leave, duck, lick his mouth or turn his head, or did your dog come in closer, and relax as if he really enjoyed it? These different responses are your dog's way of telling you if he would like to be touched again or not.

Don't be offended if your dog doesn't want to be touched when you are in the mood to have contact with him, simply consider that the time is not right, he may be overly-stimulated, he may not like where you touched him, or he may have had a hard day with too many people demanding his attention and just wants to be left alone. It's never personal, it is just information that tells you how your dog is feeling, and it's important to respect your dog when he communicates this information to you.

Nan Arthur, CDBC, CPDT, KPACTP
www.wholedogtraining.com