

## Respect me, Respect you, Respect US!

Maureen Ross, MA, NCC, CPDT-KA, RYT

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Are you reading this because your dog(s) are doing something that annoy you? Do you feel you are respected? Well, before our dogs can respect us, we must respect ourselves. Remember the equation for healthy relationships? Healthy me plus healthy you equals happy us!

Is there a behavior you want the dog to do differently – or **stop** doing before s/he drives you nuts? Ever wonder how it came to this? Many of us do – whether with our dogs or other relationship? Feeling a little overwhelmed, trapped? A quick piece of advice from someone who learned from mistakes – and written books on the topic, ***Train Your Dog, Change Your Life and Awareness Centered Training – ACT***. Does any of this sound familiar? You are not alone! Help – woof – is a read away.

- House-training "accidents"
- Barks too much / Whines too much
- Jumps on people
- Chews whatever s/he wants
- Won't let go of things – do you?
- Steals food when you turn your back – were you supervising?
- Runs away – chase game is on – Chase, Prey, Fight, Flight, Freeze Appease (our drives)
- Seeks attention way too much
- Guards food, toys, deck, backyard, neighborhood ...
- Pulls on the leash – lunges – sniffs too much
- Seemingly aggressive toward people or other dogs – is this true?
- Struggles when you try to restrain him
- Chases the cat

The "magic words" for virtually all dog behavior problems is ... SORRY, there aren't any. There are words to teach like "No" or "STOP IT" or "ENOUGH". What you do after – MATTERS, and not in 3 days. Sure, take a deep nose-to-navel breath, but know that if you do not teach a dog what you expect, NOW, then you will have no respect.

Letting them know you want them to stop a behavior (barking for example) but expecting this to be the solution is a fantasy. Social media, Siri or Alexa (Wi-Fi know-it-alls) won't help either.

Like with children, learning a new language or starting a job, dogs are dogs, who speak a difference language. We need to teach them after the STOP what exactly it is we want them to do in a language / actions that they understand. It must be environmentally friendly, intuitive, and age related. Teaching a 2-month old puppy, with the attention span of a fruit fly, to focus on too much too soon, won't teach anything except fear and confusion.

**Dog Speaking: "I'm learning where to pee, poo, sleep, eat, what's legal and illegal in this household. Okay, you are upset, I'm stopping, now what?"**

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**"How can I stop my dog from jumping, pulling, mouthing, running away?" Simple solution – Teach them what you want them to do instead of this annoying behavior. Do it gently and understandably. In return, you will get respect from a dog who trusts your judgment as a savvy leader (dog parent).**

One of the most common questions dog parents ask me is: **"How can I stop my dog from (doing some specific behavior problem)?"**

Being a counselor who studies behavior not only in humans but dogs, I know that relationships with dogs can be emotional. Folks are hoping I will tell them there is a secret switch behind the left ear of the dog. Click that and the behavior will (poof) go away.

My respected response is almost ALWAYS the same, regardless of the behavior. Notice that is singular. I'm not referring to major aggressive or resource guarding issues where the humans are outside trying to get into their own home while the dog squad growls or barks at the door.

**You need to teach your dog what you want them to do, and use the word or signal that lets them know that right now, this place, this behavior is not acceptable. Generally, I use "ENOUGH" followed quickly with "SIT".**

Does that sound simple? Most people gaze at me in distress, wondering if I am the crazy one. They usually respond, "My dog knows NO and ENOUGH but doesn't LISTEN". I am not kidding – read the last sentence again. We've all said it at least once.

Fair enough. If the dog is not listening, first, have a wellness check-up, particularly her hearing. Never know – could be deaf. Here is what's happening. Either s/he doesn't understand what "No" or "Enough" means (this is true in MANY cases), or s/he understands it - but doesn't see any relevance in responding to your request. A dog must learn to respect you. Most dogs will only respect someone who gives clear communication, in a way they understand.

**Two key points:** Your dog must **understand** the word and action that you expect, then s/he must **respect you enough to respond**. **If a dog is anxious or fearful, they will not learn. They are SIMPLY afraid and respond to stay safe. This behavior can be good or bad.**

Without respect, your dog may UNDERSTAND what you want, but decides it's a choice. What you ask may not be relevant to them unless you have a treat or ball in hand. That's fine ... but you want your dog to respond with or without a treat. Plus, it doesn't teach a foundation for a solid, trusting relationship where you are proactive, aware of what your dog is doing, and committed to teaching what you want the dog to do.

No matter how large or small, all dogs and children, need to respect their parents. We teach our small dogs to respect us (family members) in the same way as the big dogs.

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### **Getting your dog to respect you means interacting in specific ways that encourage respect, not fear.**

Canines see and interpret the world differently than we do. Whenever you do **anything** with your dog, even just walking through the family room or kitchen, back yard, petting, or speaking to him.... s/he is busy assessing your tone of voice, facial expressions, body language, how you're touching and responding when s/he does A.B.C.. They are assessing you as much as you are them.

These seemingly little gestures are very important to your dog. They are the clues s/he uses to draw conclusions about you, to decide whether you're worthy of respect *or not*.

- If you interact with your dog in certain ways that are confusing for canines, (see body language charts at [www.dogtalk.com](http://www.dogtalk.com)) s/he will conclude that even though s/he loves you, doing what you request is an option. "You can't be serious!"
- If you interact with your dog in respectful ways, thinking about whether you truly want to shape THIS BEHAVIOR, s/he will respect you as a capable leader (provider of life rewards, nutrition, well-being, love, walks, play).

**Respectful dogs don't misbehave because they know the consequences. They learn to get what they want by doing behaviors we teach like watch-me, sit, down, stand, stay, come, relax, quiet, take-it, leave-it, drop-it, gently please, wait, enough and stop. Or, they nudge you into doing things by acting-out.**

Dogs need well-being and healthy, moderate exercise suited toward their individual needs, stages of development and health. Play sessions to tire them out, without supervision, can cause similar annoying behaviors. Some dogs need only moderate exercise. Puppies, only short sessions then settling down. This teaches self-control.

Others, specific breeds or mixes, and adolescents, need more guided exercise, like dog sports or long walks. Not frantic lunging on the end of a cable or willy-nilly chasing after balls. When the dog retrieves, WE need to be on the other end waiting for them to bring it back. Have another BALL or other TOSS OBJECT ready. Have healthy treats. Ask for a release, of **OBJECT EXCHANGE**. Allow the dog to pick a ball, a frisbee. Then, call, and have them "SIT", wait a few seconds, "GOOD and TREAT or toss ball again. Some dogs prefer more exercise, others want one chase, a treat and flop.

### **Exercise, Activities, Companionship (my pal)**

Even respectful dogs will misbehave if they don't get enough supervised exercise, interesting activities, challenges that they can achieve, and daily companionship. Allowing a dog to sniff (Olfactory is the dog's strongest sense) will help to balance energy. How easy is this? Put sniffing on cue as a reward.

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Dogs are usually sociable creatures. However, dogs don't like being mauled by other dogs who jump in their face. A polite meet/greet would be sniff, circle, sniff. Dogs, like people, need to ask, "May I please?" A solid "SIT", "WATCH-ME" is a "MAY I PLEASE?" before launching into your spatial bubble. For more on Spatial Bubbles visit [www.dogtalk.com](http://www.dogtalk.com) or *Awareness Centered Training – ACT*.

Teaching dogs, and particularly Registered Therapy Dog Teams, has taught me that ALL dogs need to learn basic manners and socialization skills. What we teach potential therapy dog teams is exactly what all puppies / dogs deserve to become happy, healthy and confident in the real world. They will not be perfect – but with our guidance – close.

### **Boredom and frustration are major causes of behavior problems in dogs.**

Dogs vent boredom and frustration by destroying things, digging and escaping. The number one complaint from dog owners, barking. Truthfully, your dog has every right to vent his boredom when his needs of exercise and companionship are not being met.

Training and focusing energy on positive outlets helps! Teaching behaviors and respectful attitudes, human-to-dog and dog-to-human, can easily happen while living and learning with your dog, using natural life rewards (what dogs need to thrive).

### **What you can do right now to prevent or stop behavior problems**

You need to learn effective ways to interact with your dog, teaching them to enjoy following, and being, with you. On this journey, you will make mistakes, learning the wrong ways too. Setting boundaries not only for the dog, but others, on how to interact with your dog is proactive and important. "SIT" is a must.

I teach [switching](#) dogs to other sides, from behind, in Level 1. Redirecting to another, more appropriate behavior (watch-me and sit), turn around and/or increasing distance between what excites them to a manageable place works. You need to get your dog's attention. Otherwise, they can't learn. It is simply babble to them.

Getting angry wastes valuable energy. We all do it. A better approach is to be proactive, rather than reactive, especially when our dogs are being reactive. Two reactive beings launch the situation out of control. Take a deep-nose-to-navel breath before leaping into a solution. YOU calm down. It takes a second to breathe. Now, you can sensibly and calmly manage the situation.

Many do the same thing over and over, hoping the behavior will extinguish. Some behaviors do, most will come back in full throttle. **Teaching a dog to "SIT" in the presence of anyone, in any situation, is one empowering behavior to teach.**

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You can stop a behavior with NO, ENOUGH, STOP IT - or a LOOK (just like Mom use to give). With that one word, or look, a dose of respect, balanced exercise and companionship, you will have a satisfied dog who respects you, or, tries too. Gauge your success on how the dog responds knowing that if the dog does not respond – you need to ...

**Teach Sit, Down, Stand, Stay, Come, Wait, Stop, No, Enough ...**

**Remember to reinforce (reward and praise) good behavior more than bad.**

**Be proactive ... more than reactive. “Please, stay over there, I’m working with my dog.” Be mindful, you are the dog’s parent, you set the boundaries for when, where, and with who, they interact, and for how long.**

### **Awareness Centered (Respect) Training for Puppies, Adult Dogs and People**

Aggravated dog owners often call or email me when their dog has “behavior problems”. The questions are the same on the “intake”. How old is the dog, adopted or purchased as puppy, describe the family and the dog’s environment (nutrition, exercise, other pets, children)? Have you trained dogs before? No, that’s fine. Are you reading any good dog training material or signed up for a basic manners class that allows family members to join? You get the picture. There are no instant answers, but there are options for committed dog parents.

Here is a classic example of a client interaction with Gary and his dog Quin.

**Gary:** “MY dog Quin is being difficult! He won’t listen to me or do what I want. I lay on the floor to relax and watch TV and he tries to eat my popcorn and bites my nose.

**Me:** "Okay, how old is Quin? Does he have a crate? Do you have any chairs or a sofa to sit on?"

**Gary** (surprised): "He’s 4-months old. No, he doesn’t respect me. I have a crate and that’s where I put him. I have furniture – obviously – why?"

**Me:** Well, at 4-months, Quin doesn’t have a clue, especially if one moment you are playing with him on the floor, and the next you have popcorn. The positions are same to him. He thinks that sharing popcorn is the new game.

### **Talking Back – (Barking, Growling, Whining)**

**Me:** “Does Quin sass you when you tell him to do something by barking back or running off with a toy? Does he bark in his crate? What do you do?”

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**Gary:** "Ah well, sometimes. He barks before and after I coax him into the crate with a treat. He can be stubborn. No matter how many times I tell him to be quiet ... he keeps barking, then whines. I can't stand it – so I let him out to pee."

**Me:** "Does he ever grumble at you when you wake him up or try to brush him? How about when you reach toward his food bowl while he's eating? Or when you touch some "sensitive" part of his body, like his tail or stomach or paw?"

**Gary:** "Yes, no he doesn't growl at me, I don't feed the dogs much, my wife does. He did growl at the Vet Tech on his wellness check-up."

**Me:** Ah, so next time, maybe you can bring some healthy treats for the Vet and Vet Tech to give him while you calmly hold him and let him sniff a treat – creating an association that isn't so scary. He may not like going to the Vet, but he has too right?"

**Gary:** Hmm, right. Okay, that makes sense.

### **Hanging onto objects**

**Me:** "Does he brace his legs and refuse to let go when you try to take something away from him – like playing a game with a tug toy?"

**Gary:** "Are you kidding. He's a terrier. He loves to tug and growl. He chewed by sneakers and steals my socks, then runs off."

**Me:** How about teaching him to drop the toy for a "SIT" and a "TREAT". You can use the word, "RELEASE" or "DROP-IT". You choose.

### **Pestering you**

**Me:** "Does Quin persistently nudge you for attention when you're trying to read a book, watch a movie or talk on the phone?"

**Gary:** "Yup. As I said, I lay on the floor – eat popcorn – watch sports. When I'm not paying attention to him. He thinks I am his butler or play toy."

**Me:** Aha ... well Quin is only 4-months old so he is learning. So what might seem like being a pest is his way of figuring out what he can play with, or not and for how long.

### **Stealing food – I am a dog thief!**

**Me:** "Does Quin steal food off your plate when you leave it unattended even though he doesn't when you are there watching? Can he get into the trash?"

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**Gary:** "No, he's too short for that yet – and our trash is contained. He is only 10 lbs. Hmm, yeah, he ate half my Egg McMuffin off the coffee table."

**Me:** Where were you?

**Gary:** In the bathroom. Oh, I get it.

### Getting back at you

**Me:** "When Quin doesn't get his own way or is upset with you, what does he do?"

**Gary:** "He barks at me or steals my flip flop. He's a little S\$#T. When I tell him I'm tired, he ignores me."

### Staying just out of your reach

**Me:** "When you reach your hand toward Quin, does he sometimes dart away from you, keeping just out of reach?"

**Gary:** "Yeah, he does.... he doesn't want me to catch him, especially outdoors. He wants to stay out."

### Running away from you

**Me:** "When you catch Quin doing something wrong, does he run from you or lead you on a merry goose chase around the house or yard?"

**Gary:** "He has a lot of energy – he needs to let it out. He runs, so I can't scold him – and if I catch up with him, he's so cute, I don't have the heart to scold him."

### "Telling off" strangers or other dogs

**Me:** "Does Quin decide who is or isn't welcome in your home? Does he bark or growl at visitors? Does he pitch a fit when he sees another dog on walks?"

**Gary:** "Hmm, he loves people. Only is in strange places like the Vets – he gets anxious. He gets excited with other dogs. We have three older dogs who are teaching him to be calmer. That's a good thing I guess. I know he's learning – I guess I forgot what puppy behavior is like."

### Jumping on people

**Me:** "If he is asked to "SIT", by you or others, does he? **Silence. Then ...**

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**Gary:** "I'm beginning to see where you are going with this. I haven't taught him sit much and I know I should. Maybe I should attend training school with him. He listens to my wife."

**Me:** "And, you said he is 4-months? Are you aware that at 4-months, puppies have learned a lot beginning with their littermates? At 1-year they are behaviorally equivalent to a 15-year-old human teenager. This doesn't mean you are bad dog parent. We know more today about how puppies develop. At 6 months, they are around 10 years old – so Quin will be 6-months soon. Now is the time to think about what you want the adult Quin to be like. Imagine beginning to teach a human child at 10. I have some terrific hand-outs on this at [www.dogtalk.com](http://www.dogtalk.com). I suggest you read some, and begin practicing some simple behaviors like "watch-me, sit, release, come,". Have everyone do this with Quin."

**Gary** (sighing): "You're right. Quin – is acting like an out of control toddler. I get agitated, then neither of us learns anything. I'd like to join a class – who do you suggest?"

### **Why socialization and manners are essential**

**Me:** "Why me of course, but I'm happy to schedule a private coaching session or two helping you and Quin catch up. Then you can join a positive reward based teaching class wherever you choose. The behaviors you describe are not right or wrong, good or bad, simply learned behaviors. Quin is doing what he thinks will bring him what he wants. The behaviors are disrespectful, but he doesn't know any better."

**Gary:** "You're right – and I know Quin deserves to learn how to behave. I need help."

**Me:** "Yes, that is why I have families attend classes. They can integrate training tools into daily activities with dogs, so can you with Quin. Take Quin for a walk at the park, with a pocket of healthy treats. Ask children to calmly ask him to "SIT" and offer a treat in an opened hand."

Make sense? Dogs have a pecking order. They learn when they are born, especially with littermates and Mom. It's important, and fun, to learn how dogs learn. They have a hierarchy from the moment they are born. Then they join our human family. Consider it exploration, or like climbing a career ladder. Dogs are sociable animals who like to live with other sociable animals in a group or pack. This "pack instinct" is built into your dog's genes. When transitioning into human families, puppies are amazingly resilient. They learn who, what and when they can do certain behaviors and/or get away with certain behaviors. So, lying on the floor with popcorn may be too much temptation for little Quin until he learns what "LEAVE-IT, this is MINE" is. Then, you can give him his treat saying, "YOURS".

### **When a dog joins your family, even if your family consists only of a single person, YOU, a pack is formed.**



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In the dog's mind, instincts compel him to seek out structure and life rewards (how to get needs AND pleasures) met. Who are the leaders and who are the followers? Whoever sets the boundaries (rules) and has the life rewards for survival are the leaders. The rest are the followers. This doesn't mean that children and teenagers, or grandma and grandpa can't train. They can - with supervision. Dogs perceive most children under 12 as littermates. Without supervised interaction, good, or bad things can happen when children and dogs engage.

Quin is not really being disrespectful when he takes your popcorn. Quin is being a puppy, learning, and carrying out what he perceives as his role as your leader, especially on the floor with popcorn.

**Gary** (wow): "But I don't want to be mean or boss my dog around. It is just my wife and I, but we have children visit. I want him to be gentle and be their friend."

**Me:** The relationship between you, others and Quin can be changed to one of calm and respectful meet/greets, including with children (supervised). Quin can learn to safely tolerate wellness checkups, grooming, nail clipping, learn to "SIT", including with children. Remember, "SIT" is like saying, "May I please?" Even before going out, have Quin "SIT, WAIT", then "OKAY GO OUT".

Positive interactions, engaging with others in unfamiliar situations needs to happen slowly, safely and with supervision. I'll teach you how to introduce Quin to sights, sounds, and things more calmly. This can be achieved daily, while integrating life rewards (food, toys, play, touch, walk, cuddle time).

**Me:** "Gary, friends are equals. Quin is your **dependent**. He depends on you for his health, his safety, his life rewards (see above and read again)."

For example, you might need to give medicine that tastes awful ... take something dangerous out of his mouth, bring him to the Vet or Groomer or roll him onto his back so you can remove a tick from his belly.

So, pairing it with something good, like asking for a "SIT", then giving a healthy treat, makes it less scary. Think of it like this, "You do something for me and I'll do something for you." In other words, a respectful relationship.

You dog will learn to feel safe and accept wellness behaviors such as clipping his toenails, cleaning his teeth, or sitting quietly while you attach his leash. Teaching a dog to SIT is akin to us, as humans, saying "May I Please?" "Why yes, you may, as soon as I am ready and you are calm (four paws down).

**Gary:** "I am worried if I try to take charge all the time, we won't enjoy our relationship, or have fun"

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**Me:** "I don't think so. Quin will respect you and others. Most dogs will when they understand what is expected of them. When your dog recognizes you as a capable leader worthy of respect, he will respond in kind. He will be a more contented dog because he understands what you want because you clarify what "SIT" means, for how long, when and where.

Let's review why dogs who are confident enough to be calm are happier, more secure, and generally, this dog will teach other dogs to be calm too.

### **Dogs feel safe and secure when they know that someone they respect is in charge.**

Your dog craves a leader who they can trust and manage a variety of situations. The dog does not have to worry about trying to figure out our complicated, and oftentimes, unfamiliar world. Dogs who learn to follow your lead can relax.

### **Dogs who look to us for direction are generally happier and enjoy engaging with other dogs and people.**

Dogs who learn to watch us before taking the lead themselves are willing to listen. Teaching them good behaviors is easy and joyful. Simply integrate into daily routines (life rewards) like eating, walking, and for sure, consider a gentle, positive training class.

People appreciate well-behaved dogs and are quick to pet and compliment them. Therapy dogs, for example, are conditioned from as soon as possible, to enjoy interaction with the unfamiliar by paying close attention to their partner (YOU) for cues on what to do next.

### **Like children, or a game or sports, dogs feel more secure and calm when they have learned the rules of the game (living in a household) and the consequences of what they do.**

### **Dogs are more content when they learn how humans communicate, becoming familiar with our requests and hand-signals for sit, down, stay, come, gentle, enough, wait, stop, take-it, leave-it and release.**

**Gary:** "Okay, I like the idea that Quin will feel more secure when I teach him what to do. It's just easier to let someone else do it. I'm tired at night but this is temporary. Quin is learning and I have had other dogs, just forgot what a puppy is like. Our other dogs are easy but they are older. I enjoy him but realize he needs to learn and that won't come without some effort. I'm willing to put the effort into it.

**Me:** "Yeah, that's it, plus your significant other may need some help."

**Gary (hmm):** "I understand. How can I do this?"

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**Me:** There are many ways to shaped and re-shape behaviors. The simplest is ***Awareness Centered Training – ACT***, one of my books that is integrated into training programs offering joyful, easy training, integrated into daily living and learning with dogs. It is all about balance, relationship, education and well-being, and teamwork.”

**Gary:** “Okay, I get the message. Thanks. Considering I am married to you, this should be easy.”

Yes, folks, one of my clients is my long-time husband. We share our abode with 4 dogs, 2 cats and 2 parrots – a mini-zoo who teach us a lot. Our three dogs, a Greyhound, Newfoundland and Border Terrier are helping us teach Quin, a Border Terrier. We are lucky.

I revisit, rethink and learn every time I engage with my dogs, dog friends, clients and family members. Different cultures have values that may not be the same as ours. We must respect that too but not at the dog’s expense, causing fear or pain. Respectful relationships are the way to go particularly if your intention is to have your dog live within the family household and/or become a therapy dog, like several of ours are.

Find a positive, reward based trainer (clicker training is great, but not necessary). In the daily routine, remember **LIFE REWARDS**, capitalized for a reason. Use what your dog loves and needs to teach respect with watch-me (attention), sit, down, stand, stay, come, wait, enough, stop, release, take-it and leave-it. Teaching your dog builds the respectful relationship you, and the dog, are seeking.

**Our world is abundant with resources that can often cause sensory overload not only for us but our dogs.**

Focus on integrating training into daily living and learning with your dogs using Life Rewards that the dog needs and thrives on. Training must be safe, supervised (children) and communicated in a manner that a puppy or adult dog can learn from.

Happy, healthy and confident dogs, at any age, require ongoing tune-ups to maintain a healthy balance, relationship, education and well-being. What worked for a puppy may not for the older dog.

Don’t hesitate to seek out professionals for guidance. In the last 10 years, dog training has changed. ***Training our dogs can change our lives too.***

*Enjoy the Journey,*  
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Author of *Awareness Centered Training – ACT*  
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Publications on training family and therapy dog teams