

Training Bossy or Stubborn Dogs

Manage your bossy dog with consistent leadership.

Kyra Kirkwood

Many of us survived our childhood and schooling only to become independent adults who answer to ... our dogs? Yes, bossy dogs can make some owners wistful for those days of homework and curfews.

Be it barking or pawing, jumping up or charging out the front door, pushy behavior comes in many forms and degrees. Some dogs are born bossy, thanks to breed and genetics. Others learn those habits, thanks to us, the enablers.

"The dog is showing those behaviors because they work for her," says Suzanne Hetts, Ph.D., a certified applied animal behaviorist. "If pawing never worked, she would quit doing it."

Experts say some patience, consistency, and a redefinition of roles can go a long way in taming the diva in our dogs.

"Early training can prevent bossiness," says Colleen Paige, an animal behaviorist and author of the audio book "Dog Drool" (2002, \$14.95). "It's the most loving thing you can do for your dog: teaching respect."

But remember, bossy doesn't equal bad. In fact, while we give demanding behavior the human label of bossiness, it's important to remember that dogs act true to their canine natures. "They are not purposely mean-spirited or rebellious," Hetts says. "They're just trying to figure out what works to get what they want out of their world."

Why the Diva Act?

Some dog breeds' working pasts or specific temperaments make them bossier than others. German Shepherd Dogs, Chow Chows, Doberman Pinschers, Rottweilers, Chihuahuas, Parson Russell Terriers, Malamutes, and other intelligent dog breeds developed to be persistent and independent can be prime candidates for bad manners. "So can any dog taken away from its litter before 8 weeks of age," Paige says.

"It hasn't been corrected [enough] by its mother or siblings," she says. "That's going to be one bossy dog."

Yet we, as dog owners, are the leading culprits.

"If [owners] reward unacceptable behaviors, they have only themselves to blame," Hetts says.

Like overly indulged children seeking any response, our dogs will do whatever it takes to elicit a reaction from us. If they bark to be let outside, we may grumble and get annoyed, but we still obey the command.