

## Who is The Boss?

How can letting your puppy sleep on the bed with you turn into a bad thing? After all, she's used to sleeping with her littermates, curled up and cozy. As new puppy owners, we make many mistakes in the first weeks. Some of what is bad for one dog will not be bad for another, but often a clear line can be drawn from a puppyhood that was too permissive to a bad behaviour in an adult dog.

Let's take that puppy sleeping in bed with you. Yes, she is used to sleeping with her littermates. They are her equals. Together they played and wrestled but they also squabbled over toys and food. When your pup grows into a dog, do you want her to view your family as her equals? Can you afford to have your child and your dog squabble over a stuffed toy? What would have been noise and clashing of teeth with another dog can turn into a scar for life, both physically and emotionally, for a child.

Dogs function throughout their lives by understanding where they stand in position to everyone else. This means that there is only one "Boss" and everyone else isn't. Some individuals are higher or lower in status, and much like the rungs on a ladder, everyone has their own place. Every dog will use as much force as they feel is necessary to maintain its position on the ladder. Ideally, we would raise our dogs to understand that they are below all humans. Unfortunately, many of us send mixed signals to our pets. What is often hard for us to understand and relate to as people is that dogs are NOT happy being in charge. The higher up on that ladder of life you are, the more responsibilities you have you are responsible for the discipline, feeding and safety of the group. It's much easier to have these things taken care of for you. In the doggie world, those positioned above you control the food. Dominant members of the group eat first and allow those below them to eat only when they are done. What signal is being sent to those pups allowed to eat whenever they want? "I can always get food, and if it's not available, I'll bark to get more."

Another common mistake made by puppy owners is allowing the pup to view anything as their own. All things belong to the more dominant members of the group. This brings us back to that stuffed toy. Your pup may have toys that they are allowed to play with but the pup must never be allowed to view that toy as being off limits to people. It may be viewed as cute when the 12 week old puppy growls at you over a toy but when it weighs 85 lbs and strikes out when you get within 5 feet, it becomes an issue. What started as the puppy's privilege to the toy has now turned into it's right to own the toy. Only the dominant animals of a group get to set the rules. If you allow your pup to set the rules, the dog starts to view himself as The Boss. This is why basic obedience is such a valuable tool in creating a lasting bond with your pet. By teaching your companion the basic commands and exercises, you are setting down a foundation for continual respect. Puppies don't dream at night of becoming world dictators - in fact, only very rarely is a puppy born that is truly dominant. Most pups that turn into dominant type dogs do so because they perceive a lack of guidance and leadership. "If no one else is going to set some rules, I guess I'll have to do it." Nothing in life is free. This should be the main theme of any pet dog's life. If you make your dog earn it's treat by sitting, it's dinner by waiting until you say it's ok to eat, and you praise your dog for following your instructions, you will have a dog that is a lasting and enjoyable companion. Remember - dogs don't grow out of bad behaviour; they grow into it. Things for you to remember: You must not be your dog's equal. There is a difference between a right and a privilege. The one that controls the food is in charge. Basic obedience to you means you set the rules. Nothing in life is free.