



Puppies, just like their wild wolf cub counterparts, use play to develop life skills, and to establish their place in the social group.

fun, and laughter. The connection between living with and caring for a dog, and the subsequent effect on our emotional and physiological states is discussed later in the book.

### **Hierarchy**

Wolf pack hierarchy is something we are still trying to properly understand. However, we do know that the 'alpha pair' (male and female) lead and guide the pack, and are responsible for producing and raising the young (most packs contain only one breeding pair). At the other end of the scale is the 'omega' – the lowest ranking wolf in the pack, who can be male or female. In-between come offspring of varying ages, though generally below the age of sexual maturity.

The situation for family dogs is similar, depending on how many members comprise the social group.

### **Your life with your dog**

How your dog develops whilst living with you will have a significant influence on the relationship between you. The first four weeks of a dog's life with his mother are very important, as a lot of learning goes on during that period.

Social interaction begins with the mother before the pup's eyes are open, with smell and touch the main sensory inputs. By four weeks old, the ears are open, and the pup is ready to receive input from all five senses.

During the next period of socialisation, hierarchy – the pup's place in the group – is established via playing and rough-and-tumble activities with his siblings. The UK charity Dogs Trust says that a pup is not ready to leave his mother before eight weeks of age, and the UK Dog Advisory Council publishes a seven-point guide about choosing a dog –

- choosing a breed
- choosing the right dog: exercise requirements of puppies and dogs
- choosing the right dog: costs of dog ownership
- rehomed dogs
- finding a trustworthy breeder

## Your dog and you – understanding the canine psyche



Ensuring that the personalities of you and your dog are a good match – before making a commitment to look after them – is an important step.

and you may find yourself under stress because of divided loyalties between family members and your canine companion, so it's important to know your boundaries and tolerance limits.

Well-known British broadcaster and journalist Mariella Frostrup wrote an article about how, when their two dogs had to be cared for by friends and neighbours for two nights a week, the dogs' toilet habits changed for the worse, and her "two perfectly house-trained dogs who lived happily in our apartment in London," began to leave unwelcome deposits in the morning.

Their vet thought that the change in routine and disruption the dogs experienced had probably caused the change in bowel habits, and advised they concentrate on a strict routine, with meals at exactly the same times every day and regular walks morning and night, to "help diminish their [the dogs'] agitation." Mariella explains they took his advice and have not had a problem since.

### Creating harmony

It can be a good idea to make a 'wish list' of how you would like your dog to be, and also take into account what you *think* you are like. Under the headings: What I think I am like/ How I would like my dog to be, add as much detail for each.

Now, under the headings: What I actually *am* like/ What my dog actually *is* like, again, add as many points as you can for each heading.

How do the two lists compare, and are there areas that need addressing?

Next, consider who else forms part of your social group, and write down their characteristics/personalities.

How your dog and the other members of your social group interact can be very different in each case; maybe you are already aware of these differences, and have noticed how your dog's behaviour changes accordingly. It is important to try and establish continuity and consistency of care and training for your dog, who will be more settled if there is harmony between and with all of his care-givers.

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consequence). The following suggestions may help (you can copy this section so that it can be used more than once, if required) –

- |                                    |                                   |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> anger        | <input type="radio"/> controlled  |
| <input type="radio"/> anxiety      | <input type="radio"/> pressured   |
| <input type="radio"/> feeling low  | <input type="radio"/> alone       |
| <input type="radio"/> guilty       | <input type="radio"/> ignored     |
| <input type="radio"/> frustrated   | <input type="radio"/> rejected    |
| <input type="radio"/> criticised   | <input type="radio"/> unloved     |
| <input type="radio"/> embarrassed  | <input type="radio"/> blamed      |
| <input type="radio"/> disrespected | <input type="radio"/> cheated     |
| <input type="radio"/> resentful    | <input type="radio"/> scared      |
| <input type="radio"/> mocked       | <input type="radio"/> discouraged |
| <input type="radio"/> worthless    | <input type="radio"/> abandoned   |

Step 2 – identify the situation that gave rise to the feelings: call this A.

In-between A and C, of course, must be B –

Step 3 – work out what you were thinking at the time the situation occurred: call this B (your beliefs/thinking)

How we think can be a reflection of our beliefs about how things should be in the world; how other people should behave; how we should be treated, and our views on life in general.

In CBT, we say that a situation or another person are not the reasons why we sometimes feel bad, but rather what we *think* about the situation or the person is what gives rise to our negative feelings. In that case, A does not cause C, but what and how we think about the situation (B) decides how we *feel* about it (C).

Often, we have quite strong beliefs about how we should be treated by other people and life; what should happen to make life 'fair,' or how we should behave in order to be a 'good' person. When life doesn't live up to our expectations, we can become upset, giving way to unsettling feelings that "It shouldn't be like this!" But if it's not possible to change the situation or event that has made us feel this way, continuing with this belief will only result in further distress and emotional imbalance.

And all the while, don't forget, our dog is watching us



Just as people feel empathy and can share the pain that another is feeling, it is thought that dogs have this ability with their owners. The notion that our dog struggles when we do is a powerful one ... (and opposite).

struggle with the difficult situation or interaction with others, and our upset becomes *his* upset!

When faced with this situation, one way we can help ourselves is to stop and consider how we can change our thinking, and give ourselves time to rationalise our thinking.

Changing our way of thinking from "It shouldn't be like this!" to "I don't like what is happening, and I would prefer

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- low body posture
- changes in eating habits
- pacing, restlessness
- signs of strain around the eyes and mouth; furrowed brow
- shedding hair more than usual
- avoiding people – looking/turning away
- sweating from paws – indicated by sweatmarks on the ground or floor
- dilated pupils
- slow, deliberate movements: cautious and watchful
- whale eye (when the white of the eyes show)

Something to watch out for is if a stressed dog suddenly stops panting and closes his mouth: this could be a sign that he is about to nip or bite.

### Calming signals

A dog uses calming signals in an effort to prevent unpleasant things from happening – avoiding conflicts, avoiding threats, calming people and other dogs, dispelling nervousness, fear and anxiety, and also saying “I am no threat.” All dogs use these signals as a universal language, which mean the same whether the dog is an Akita, a German Shepherd or a Neapolitan Mastiff.

Typical calming signals –

- head turning – dogs dislike head-on approaches from other dogs, animals, and people, preferring



An intense stare or sudden closing of the mouth can indicate stress – and impending aggression.

