

# “How to Mess Up A Dog”

By Sean O'Shea

So much of what we see with problem dogs and their behavior is that people have unintentionally reinforced and encouraged the wrong stuff. And of course, none of us want to intentionally mess up our dogs (even though many of us – including yours truly have). So, here's a little list of reminders that we'll call the “don't do”, or “watch out for” list. Keeping these in mind, and doing your very best to avoid these common dog/owner traps will go a long way towards you having a great relationship, and enjoyable life with your dog.

**-Trying to love a badly-behaved dog better.** (Guaranteed to make a bad dog worse)

**-Coddling, nurturing, babying an insecure, nervous dog.** (The very best way to deepen insecurity, and to ensure a neurotic mess of a dog)

**-Allowing a dog to have constant access to you and your personal space – following you everywhere, jumping in your lap uninvited, always needing to be near.** (The perfect recipe for separation anxiety and possessiveness)

**-Constantly petting a dog.** (The very best way to create a dependent, nervous, entitled, bratty, separation anxiety dog)

**-Ignoring bad behavior – jumping, whining, barking, fence fighting, growling etc. – in the hopes it will go away.** (It never does, it only gets worse)

**-Using your dog to fill emotional gaps in your life.** (The most common reason for neurotic, unstable dog behavior)

**-Not enforcing rules because they feel bad.** (A selfish act that ensures your dog will not have access to the rules and leadership it needs to thrive and be balanced)

**-Letting dogs be “dogs” – thinking/rationalizing that growling, protective behavior, resource guarding, reactivity etc. is normal/acceptable.** (These excuses of unacceptable/unhealthy behavior by calling it “normal” allows it to continue/increase)

**-Being inconsistent.** (Teaches dogs rules and boundaries are always negotiable, and ensures they will be negotiated)

**-Accidentally rewarding whining/barking/growling by petting/talking to/letting in or out of a door/crate.** (Teaches dogs that those behaviors get them what they want, and ensures you'll see a whole lot more of them)

**-Spoiling/allowing bad behavior due to guilt.** (Feeling guilty about working long hours/being away from home for long periods and trying to assuage that guilt by spoiling the dog/being permissive/allowing bad behavior to occur to make ourselves feel better. Unfortunately, it only makes your dog feel/behave worse)

**-Letting stressed, pulling, anxious, worked up dogs meet on-leash.** (This is a common scene that can create dog reactivity and even dog fights)

**-Letting dogs pull to trees or bushes on walks.** (Teaches dogs that pushiness gets them what they want)

**-Touching, talking to, “enjoying” a dog who jumps on you.** (Reinforces jumping and guarantees more jumping)

**-Letting dogs “work it out” on their own.** (Old school approach to “socializing” dogs that is a great way for creating dog fights and never-ending tension/grudges between dogs that live together)

**-Giving treats or petting a growling/barking/anxious/stressed dog to calm and soothe them.** (A very common mistake that does the exact opposite of making it better. It always makes the behavior worse, by reinforcing it)

**-Sharing only your soft, sweet, loving, affectionate side.** (This is akin to only saying yes and cuddling your child, and never saying no or enforcing rules. It leaves dogs feeling alone and unsure about who's in charge, nervous, anxious, stressed, and out of control – just like it would kid)

**-Using tools that allow dogs to ignore you and the tool.** (The wrong tools – harnesses, flat collars, flex leashes etc. – can actually empower the dog to misbehave and disempower you from communicating with your dog)

**-Using tools that allow/encourage the dog to behave worse.** (See above!)

**-Seeing freedom, love, and affection as more vital to your dog's well-being than structure, rules, guidance.** (This is a common mistake, born out of either our desire to nurture, our desire to fulfill ourselves, or not understanding that dogs need guidance and leadership at least as much as they do "love". It's also the best way to truly mess up a dog)

**-Thinking exercise and activity create calm, relaxed dogs on their own.** (This is a huge misconception. exercising a dog to try to make it calm is futile and limited benefit endeavor. The best approach is both exercise AND teaching the dog to be conditioned to be calm through training)

**-Wanting to be your dog's best friend before having become his leader.** (Trying to create a healthy relationship through love, play, and friendship without first creating respect, rules, and boundaries is a first-class ticket to problem dog city! First impressions are as important to dogs as they are to people, and trying to fix negative first impressions is just as formidable)

**-Thinking dogs just want to please you.** (Like all the rest of us, dogs want to please themselves first and foremost. If you'll look hard enough you'll see the benefit for them in whatever they're doing to please you. Understanding this is essential to living well with dogs)

**-Not sharing valuable consequences for bad behavior.** (The most common way owners allow negative behaviors to continue and flourish! It is only through clear, valuable consequences for their choices and actions that dog behavior changes and improves)

**-Being afraid that consequences and discipline will ruin your relationship.** (A common misconception. The truth is, the exact opposite; you'll create a much healthier, respectful, balanced, and enjoyable relationship by sharing clear boundaries and rules consistently. Your dog will be happier and enjoy you far more if you'll be a good leader)

**-Letting love blind you to your dog's actual needs.** (So many of us are so desperate to connect and love and nurture that we'll forgo sharing what actually makes our dogs happy, balanced, and comfortable. This is a selfish act, based on our needs, not our dogs.)

**-Letting your needs blind you to your dog's actual needs.** (So many of us struggle to connect, feel safe, engage in love within the human world, or are just overwhelmed, overworked and lean on our dogs for love, support, nurturing, in a world where we aren't able to receive the same support and nurturing from our own kind. When our dogs represent so much more than just being our dogs, it can become next to impossible to share the leadership, discipline, structure, rules, and accountability they need to thrive)

Of course, there's always more, but this is a pretty good place to start to get a better handle on you and your dog's relationship. And if you're having any issues, chances are awfully good that you'll find the cause right here in this post.