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## About the Author

Murray Haven has always had one or more dogs sharing his life and thinks that they have enriched it in various ways.

Murray wrote “How to Understand Your Dog” so that he could share what he has learned from his own dogs and from friends and his personal research about ways to have a great relationship with our dogs, what to do to avoid problems and the best ways to deal with those that might happen.

Murray said, “A lot of people want to give their dog or dogs the best of everything but, despite their best efforts, many have problems controlling the dog or developing a satisfying relationship with their pet.”

Sometimes, small mistakes or misunderstandings between them and their dog can cause long-lasting unhappiness.

That may also cause problems when the misbehavior causes problems with other members of the family and even with neighbors and the local authorities. That could have serious outcomes with them giving up their pet as uncontrollable.

“I hope that my book will help all my readers to enjoy their experiences with their dogs more.”

Murray says, “I feel a debt to the dogs which I’ve had for the lessons I’ve learned from them as well as the marvelous times we have shared.”

“Researchers believe that having a dog for company and exercise has physical and mental health benefits. They also say that children benefit from having a dog for play, but also to help them learn lessons about sharing and caring which will help them in their dealings with other children and people in general.”

There are many books which cover looking after a dog and Murray’s book has some information about the general care of dogs of all ages, but he focuses on building and maintaining understanding and trust between the reader and their dog to ensure they both can have maximum enjoyment and benefits from their time together.

## Introduction

Please don't tell any fervent cat lover that I said this but dogs are probably the most popular pet in most countries, and that's understandable.

We human beings have been sharing our homes with them from when the home was usually a cave.

In return, dogs have provided companionship, protection and even become willing slaves to make our lives easier. They often received only small rewards for their work. Many were discarded when they became less useful or were a nuisance to their owners.

Today, most dog owners make an effort to provide a good home and a happy life for their dogs. Despite their best efforts, many people have problems with their pets that cause frustration and even despair because they find it hard to fix the issues.

I've written "How to Understand Your Dog" to help owners and their families get some idea of why dogs in general, and their dog in particular, acts in the way it does.

The suggestions are based on my experience and research. I've had a lot of discussions with dog owners as well as veterinarians, breeders and other people with wide experience and understanding of dogs of all types.

The tips have been successful for many people but I suggest that you also take into consideration what you know about your own dog because every dog is different.

There are variations even between members of the same litter. The differences can be even more significant between other members of the breed or other breeds due to genetics. Other factors, including upbringing, life experience and the influence of the people and other dogs which they have interacted with also have a major impact in many cases.

However, I believe that the pointers and strategies I explain will be useful in helping you to build a better and more fulfilling relationship with your dog(s).

The effort is small and the benefit for your family and your dog is worth it.

## Dogs are Different from People



Dogs have some habits which we might be arrested for if we started doing them.

We shake hands, they sniff each other. You can minimize that but keep in mind that it's a very important part of communication between dogs.

Try to understand these habits and don't worry too much.

That is just one point of difference, but many people forget it when they start to interact with their pet.

And, many people forget, or perhaps ignore, that all dogs are different from each other when they try to connect with a dog that they may have never met before.

There are so many ways in which we differ from dogs and those differences can cause a lot of problems if we don't at least acknowledge their significance.

The more we understand the actual motivations and desires of dogs (according to current research and allowing for our experience with that particular dog), the more likely we can get the best possible results from our interactions.

I think this is one of the most common causes of problems developing in someone's relationship with their dog.

It can also make the repairing of that bond more difficult and stressful.

Rather than lay out the most significant differences here, I will explain them in the sections of this book where we look in detail at the areas where they have some influence on the problem.

That will make it easier to remember so you will be able to keep them in mind and avoid problems as much as possible.

## Leaders and Lackeys

One of the most important differences between dogs and people is the way that their families and social groups are organized.

### Packs and Families

With people, most of us live in a structure based on families. The division of power and responsibility is usually fairly stable throughout the time that family group is together.



With dogs, their family structure is based on that of their ancestor, the wolf. The wolves have a group where there is one dominant alpha male and one dominant alpha female to which all the other members defer.

The other members of the pack may change their status within the group over time by competition or because a member of higher rank leaves the pack for some reason.

Our ability to control our dog and successfully deal with other dogs that we encounter in our daily lives depends in part on how they perceive their position and ours within the “pack” or family.

Our leadership of the family is accepted by the humans but it is under constant re-evaluation by our dog!

### Being the Leader

Being a leader is not easy but you will not build the best possible relationship with your dog if you do not set yourself as its leader and consciously maintain that position in its mind and, most importantly, your own.



## **Friendships and Alliances**

Another point which many people get confused which can be the source of problems is that dogs form alliances for mutual benefit.

Most relationships between people and humans are largely on that basis.

The domestication of dogs has caused them to treat us in ways that we are more comfortable with than when they were still at least partly wolves, but to think that they are our friends in the sense that other members of our social group are is wrong.

They will accept us as leaders and they may even give their lives to defend us or our property, but they are really allies and house guests more than they are friends like the humans in our social groups.

## We Have Met the Problem and It is Us!

I’ve adapted the statement made by Walt Kelly’s famous cartoon character, Pogo, “We have met the Enemy and He is US!”, for the title of this chapter.

It’s the best way I know to emphasize that most of the misunderstandings which become the basis for problems between owners and dogs are caused by the people and not the dogs.



I accept that some dogs are savage or anti-social by nature, but they are a very small minority.

The majority of those who are in unhappy relationships with little chance of improvement may be abandoned or euthanized when the relationship breaks down completely, and get to that point because of the actions or lack of

understanding shown by the humans they are involved with.

But, most owners make strong efforts to get their dog settled to the point where they are part of the family group.

The picture shows a common mistake. Although the dog appears to be enjoying the play, their ears are very sensitive and this would usually irritate a dog and may even cause some pain if done roughly.

## Choosing Your Dog



There are many ways of choosing a dog. The worst is probably to give in to pressure from a family member to buy one which they’ve seen or that someone they know is giving away and desperately needs a new and probably better home.

I put this section here because a major reason that so many dogs end up in refuges and are put to sleep each year is because their owners are unable to keep paying the upkeep for their beloved pet.

Getting a dog or any other pet is a big decision. To ensure a good outcome for your family and the new family member, take time to ensure that the dog will fit in with your lifestyle and all members of your family.

After all, you’re making a commitment for possibly fifteen years. Consider the less exciting but equally important factors such as the cost. Any pet will need good food, veterinary care, bedding, toys, treats. All that is expensive.

Pet insurance can help with some of the inevitable medical expenses but you will probably find that you still have to pay a large part of non-routine expenses.

You will probably need to make changes to some rooms in your home to protect some of your possessions or to reduce hazards for the dog. and keeping the dog amused and exercised may require adjustments to some parts of your regular routine.

If you are not going to breed from your dog, please get it neutered. That will also help to reduce the pressure on refuges and the distress of so many abandoned dogs.

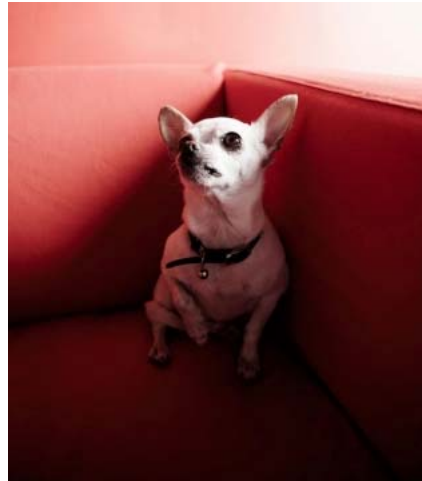
If you are a very stable and compassionate person, you might decide to rescue a dog and give it a home. It can be very worthwhile.

## Your New Dog

Many dogs and most puppies will naturally exhibit some nervousness or even fear when they leave their previous home and come into yours.

They are like the new kid at school, except the other students are a lot bigger and totally different in appearance and smell to those it was used to.

The dog may have had little meaningful social contact with humans. It probably was not given any of the toys, blankets or other familiar objects from its previous home which might be a source of comfort until it becomes more settled within your family – it’s likely to feel like it is stranded and alone in an alien world.



You and your family have the task of helping it to adjust and thrive so that it learns how it can start to fit in as a member of the family.

This is not always easy for you or the other family members. It will require the cooperation of everyone to some degree, not just the person that is expected to have the main responsibility for its care.

Here are some of the most useful tips which I have found through personal experience or discussion with other owners.

Any dog will respond best when no more than two people deliver the training – the pack leader and the one that is responsible for its general care.

Other members of the family should be welcomed as assistants but always be careful that they don’t confuse the dog by issuing instructions which might conflict with the ones which the dog has already been given.

Despite their best efforts, this is likely to dilute the effectiveness of the training and also have the dog wondering who is really the leader they are supposed to obey.

All the planning and preparation should be done before the puppy is brought

to your home.

Shortly before its actual arrival, you should do a last check that you have made the best arrangements possible that its housing is comfortable and secure and anything which may cause harm to the dog or which it might damage has been dealt with.

The first few days will be exciting and very busy for all that are involved.

The puppy will need periods where it can rest without being bothered by anybody.

I still think that a clock or some electronic device with a loud tick does comfort a puppy during its first few nights in its new home. But, don't expect that your puppy will be able to get through them without crying, whimpering or needing to rush to the toilet late at night.

## Dogs and Children

Many people have fond memories of their own pets they had during childhood or maybe they did not have their own dog when they were young. In either case, they feel that their own children will be happier if they have a dog as a companion who can help them explore and learn about their new world.



Another reason which people give for getting a dog when their children are young is that looking after it will help the child become more responsible and caring for others because of their experience with their dog.

That has some truth for older children who have a sincere interest in having their own dog.

Getting a dog or other pet is a big step, especially for the animal that is likely to suffer the most if the new arrangement does not work out successfully.

There are a number of potential problems which can mostly be avoided with a little careful thought and preparation.

We need to work through these matters before we invest the time and expense in getting a dog and making the necessary changes to our living arrangements which will be needed.

We need to satisfy ourselves that the child has the time and has shown by some other actions that he or she will do a good job of looking after the needs of the dog, beyond the first exciting weeks when the dog is an exciting novelty.

The child is likely to have other interests that can cause problems with finding the time to socialize with and care for their new pet every day.

But, that interaction is vital for them to establish a strong relationship and reduce the possibility of the dog becoming neglected and stressed.

Even then, the parents must be ready to fill in at times as deputy carer when

other important commitments mean the child cannot be available to give the dog the care and exercise which it desperately needs to remain healthy and comfortable.

Supervision is also important to keep the children and the dog safe while they are learning to get along with each other.

I’m told that there is little chance of germs passing from a dog which is looked after to a child, but you should set firm limits about how they contact each other and not let them share food etc. so that they are both at minimal risk.

## Your Dog and Your Children

Children and dogs have a number of traits which make it essential that they are carefully supervised in their interactions.

All children below the age of six should be supervised at all times when they are with any dog. That applies even when the children and the dog have been part of the same family for a time.



Both are at risk of injury from the innocent, but unguided actions of the other. That can happen in play when their energy and excitement exceeds their ability or when they are just getting to know each other.

They all have a strong sense of ownership for their food, toys and other possessions. Children should learn not to disturb their pet when it is eating or playing with a toy. Also, the dog has to learn to tolerate the actions of the child even when they would usually trigger its natural defensive instincts.

Most problems can be avoided if you train the children while you are training the dog.

### *Getting to Know the Dog*

Children need to learn how to approach their dog or puppy and when to leave it alone.

No-one should approach a dog from behind as dogs don't like being surprised in that way. They might react defensively and even cause injury to that person. Tell your child to always speak quietly to the dog when they approach it so it is not startled.

Do not to run toward a dog, especially one that does not know you very well.

Some children yell at a dog just to attract its attention. Dogs are likely to interpret that as an expression of anger or alarm.

Dogs, and especially puppies, need some quiet time where they can rest



without being expected to play. This rest time is as important to puppies for



their proper development as it is to very small children. A tired puppy is more likely to be accidentally hurt a child.

The quiet time should be a set part of every day so that the children know to let the dog rest. It may even be a

way to encourage the children to rest themselves.

Sometimes, when it has been involved in a game with family members, your dog will take the toy and want to play by itself. This is natural. It is linked to the dog’s self-confidence so it should not be interrupted. It usually lasts for just a few minutes.

Children should be taught to let the dog alone until it is ready to rejoin them. If they try to take the toy away, the dog will become defensive, though that is usually confined to gestures rather than actual aggression.

No-one should disturb the dog when it is eating or sleeping. This is obvious but it is quite common for children, especially, to do it when they are excited about starting a game or taking the dog for a walk. That can cause the dog to react instinctively and damage the relationship between the dog and the child even when there is no physical harm from the incident.

When you first introduce your children to their new puppy, I suggest that you have them sitting, if possible, so their range of movement is restricted, and then let the animal approach them.

**Patting:** This is a natural way of showing affection for the dog but many children need a little help understanding how to do it in a way which does not make the dog nervous or irritated. Don’t let the child rub the dog’s fur in the

opposite direction to the way the fur lays.

Also, the child should always speak gently to the dog as it approaches it and before it starts to pat it.

**Hugging** is a natural demonstration of affection between people and very young children do it routinely because many people have done it to them.

But, dogs interpret the action differently. In their history it was a demonstration of superiority. Many dogs will resent the restriction of their movement.

Most dogs don't like being picked up and the child should be told not to do that. This can be risky to the dog as the child could unintentionally cause it pain or even serious injury.

**Letting a child offer their dog a treat** can help them become friends more quickly, but it should only be done when you or another older responsible family member is present.

You should demonstrate the safe way to do it. Let the child put the treat on their flat open palm and then offer it to the dog. If they hold it in their fingertips, the dog might accidentally nip them, especially if the child's hand is shaking or he or she is holding the treat tightly.

**Sharing toys:** Attempting to take a toy or food from the dog will possibly trigger the animal's natural aggressive reaction which could cause injury or, at the very least frighten the child and cause the dog to be punished for what happened.

That will embed bad memories in both the child and the dog which will make it harder for them to build a healthy and satisfying relationship based on trust.

Children and dogs are highly curious. Either of them may become frightened by the innocent but unwelcome attention they get from the other. Again, that can lead to aggression or injury.

### ***Other Children***

It is a very important part of every dog's socialization training to interact with

people, including children, from outside of its family group while it is still a puppy.

Avoid bringing your new dog in contact with children and other people that you don't know until it has some experience with a variety of people that you know well.

A few good encounters before meeting strangers will give the dog at least a small amount of confidence when you take it into the wider community.

### ***Babies***

Most dogs will accept a new baby or an older child joining the family just like most children will welcome a puppy or an older dog.

Small, excitable breeds should be monitored extra carefully because they could upset the baby which would also cause stress for its parents. They don't pose any risk to the baby but their quick movements and natural enthusiasm need to be curbed when they are near it.

The dog may feel that its position in the family is threatened by the newcomer. It is very important that you give some time and attention to the dog during the first few weeks to keep any resentment or jealousy to a minimum.

But, you also need to set boundaries so that the dog does not cause any fright or harm to your new child.

If you make the nursery room off-limits to the dog, think about using a barrier which prevents the dog from entering the room, such as a baby gate from your pet-shop or baby supply shop.

But, I suggest that you get one which has a wire screen or wooden slots which let the dog see what is going on in the room rather than a solid structure which is likely to make the dog feel more isolated from the people and their activities in there.

Enthusiastic play actions which have been allowed, such as jumping on people, or pretending to bite them, will have to be gently but firmly discouraged.

These actions should not have been allowed to develop but their possibly harmful effects are not obvious to many pet owners until a new baby or some other event makes them consider those behaviors more closely than they had done before.

## Aggression

Aggression is the cause of many of the most common and troubling problems which affect relationships between dogs and people.

A dog is a natural predator and we cannot expect to remove all aggressiveness from its make-up without possibly causing other problems.

We need to curb its aggression so that it does not cause problems for us or the dog.

The behavior of your dog will largely depend on the training and support which you and other people in the family have given it.

Problems are more likely if the dog has been treated in a way that leaves it feeling insecure about its position with the family. This may be the result of a lack of attention and companionship, punishment involving force or shouting, or by inconsistent application of punishment and reward.

One important point is to always remember that responding to displays of playful aggression with loud yelling or force may be effective in the short term, but is likely to cause greater problems in the future.

Using force may make the dog become actually aggressive in direct response. The dog will be blamed though the human has caused the reaction.

Yelling may cause the dog to become aggressive or to affect its trust in their relationship which the owner has been carefully building.

Some incidents which are seen as aggression may have other innocent explanations.

Many dogs are punished for biting someone when they have bitten them during a game.

Often, those bites are accidental although the injury is just as real and



painful. And, many people automatically blame the dog when it may be the fault of the child or other person who, naturally, is reluctant to say they might have been at fault themselves.

It is always important to avoid making quick judgments and be sure that we have the facts before giving any punishment.

Physical punishment is not always the best type of response, especially with young dogs that are still learning or where the bad behavior is not intended to harm or intimidate the person or other animal at which it is aimed.

Dogs will learn from other penalties, such as the loss of privileges (no treat or refusal to take them for the usual walk) or just from a period where the owner refuses to interact with them.

Often, just turning away and refusing to acknowledge the dog for a short time will give it the message that the behavior is not acceptable.

Or, you might pretend that the play bite has actually hurt you. Just say something softly but sharply and pull your hand away.

This can be more effective than physical punishment and is also less likely to cause any lasting damage to their relationship.

## **Aggression toward Others**

Aggression is a big problem when dogs start to interact with people and other animals outside of the family.

The potential risks can be minimized by having your friends and their dogs meet your dog at your home or some other private location before you start to take it to areas where they will be confronted by strange people and animals that you don't know either.

Always keep your dog on a leash when you start taking it into new areas.

Also, check with your veterinarian that your dog has all necessary inoculations and that the medications have had time to start giving active protection before you risk taking it to areas where some dogs may not be inoculated.

Keep your dog at a distance from strange dogs and people until it has had some experience being near them but at a distance.

This is particularly important with strange children for the comfort and safety of them and your dog.

Always maintain a calm and supportive attitude which will help your dog remain confident and not get nervous or feel threatened.

## Barking

Barking is a dog’s natural form of communication but it can become a problem for you when it interferes with your neighbors’ enjoyment of their activities and ability to get rest.

Finding out why the dog is barking at the wrong time or to excess is important, but is often necessary to focus on stopping the barking first.



You might do that with a command, a light tap or a combination of both.

Loud yells or strong force is likely to cause greater problems in the future even if it does get quick results at the time.

Keep your focus on the dog until you are sure that it won’t start barking again.

This may require you to deal with the cause of the barking or to remove the dog to another area.

If there is no obvious reason for the dog to have been barking excessively, it may be a sign that the dog is bored and restless.

You may find it useful to get more exercise with the dog, play more games or just pay more attention to it.

I have found that is sufficient to deal with the barking of my dogs.

One person said their dog stopped barking as much after he used a barking collar. It needed batteries and citronella. But, he said the dog was conditioned after having the collar on a few times and stopped when the collar was placed on it even after its batteries ran out.

But, I would certainly try other free methods first which might stop the excessive barking altogether.



Some people put pebbles in a small can and rattling that when the dog keeps barking. I don't know how that could calm the dog, but I think it might make it more tense than it already was.

The rattling could cause an already nervous dog to be more skittish and could cause more barking or other negative consequences in the future.

## Digging

Digging is another natural activity which dogs sometimes do in places where it is a problem for their owner.

Most owners have seen their dog turn around a few times and dig at their bedding before they settle down.

This is an inherited habit which was an important skill in past times. The dogs needed to dig so they could bury food or to make a sleeping hole. Digging has mostly lost its usefulness though it probably is an enjoyable past-time for dogs that have excess energy. It can be ignored unless you find the dog is doing to excess and causing some damage to the bedding or furniture.

Otherwise, the strain between you which may be caused by the pressure you apply to get the dog to change its behavior will not be worthwhile and could be counterproductive over time.

If your dog digs in your garden or burrows under fences, then you have to take action as soon as possible.

The first step is to try to work out the reason for digging.

If it is just to burn off energy, you might be able to spare a spot on your property where you can put some loose soil or sand, perhaps with a few toys or other pleasant surprises for your dog to dig up and make it clear that other areas are off limits.

If it digs because it is frustrated and lonely while you are away at work for long periods, a patch where it can dig will also help. You may find that the dog associates the digging somehow with your return.

If so, you might want to reduce the amount of fuss you make of the dog when you get home but give it more attention and time through the periods when you are there with it.

The best tactic, where it can be managed, is to increase the amount of exercise which the dog is getting overall. This will improve its health and your relationship with it over time and it will have less energy for digging to excess.

The next step should be to indentify areas which need to be protected from this or other activity by your dog.

Those areas which are especially likely to be damaged should be fenced off. Where possible, it can be worthwhile to make to put wire on the bottom and the top of the barrier to reduce the likelihood that the dog will try to dig under or jump over it. That has the extra benefit of reducing the possibility of any injury to the dog.

Most dogs can be trained to stay clear of certain areas but that level of training will take time and effort.

### *Care with Chemicals*

When you get a dog or other pet, check all the chemicals you use are stored safely out of their reach and that you never use anything where the pet might come in contact with it even in diluted form.

**Warning:** Although some snail pellets are claimed to be safe around pets, my vet has treated dogs that have been poisoned by eating the “safe” iron-based pellets, so I would never use them. Even if the pets survive because of quick and often expensive medical attention, they go through terrible experiences and their long-term health may be significantly affected.

## Housetraining

Housetraining is a duty and not a problem but it is probably one of the most daunting tasks which every new dog owner has to deal with.



It is one of the first and most important lessons we need to teach our puppy so that it can become a member of the household.

Training a puppy requires constant watching, patience, calmness and quick action when needed.

Although dogs don't like being picked up, your puppy will have to get used to being lifted and carried with care during this vital training.

During those first weeks, I suggest that you confine the puppy each night to an area, such as a laundry room or spare room, where there is nothing which can be damaged by the puppy's wastes or its teeth.

Also make very sure that there is nothing which can hurt the puppy as it is sure to explore every nook and cranny which it can reach.

An alternative is to get a pen which you can put the puppy in, in a room from where it can see some members of the family but any accidents are confined to the floor of the pen which can be covered with newspaper over the actual non-absorbent floor of the actual pen.

Using old newspapers is often recommended but there are two potential problems.

- The ink on the newsprint will probably run when it becomes wet with pee and both liquids will mark the pet's fur and whatever possessions you are trying to protect.
- It is possible that the ink from the old newspaper will get onto the pet's fur and cause a stomach upset or worse when they lick it off.

If you can get unprinted newsprint (your local paper will sell you ends of the big rolls they use very cheaply), they are a better choice than using your old daily papers for the protecting your floors during the training period.

Putting a waterproof plastic sheet under the newsprint will stop any waste contacting the expensive floor coverings. It will also help to avoid implanting a lasting smell on the area. If the dog can smell its own waste on that area, it may feel that it is okay to use that spot as a toilet another time in the future.

You will save some accidents if you lead your pup outside to its toilet area each morning, after each feed, after a play session and before it is put in its bed or pen for the night.

It is better to lead your pup outside rather than to carry it. The pup won't really like being picked up and carried, especially when it is ready to go to the toilet. Letting it go out under its own steam, while you supervise of course, starts the process of establishing a routine in its mind where it has to go outside when it feels the need.

You will soon learn the signs of a pup that needs to go; prolonged sniffing and a tense attitude.

Don't stress the dog if it does not get outside in time. That will only make it more likely that it will have more incidents and will also damage its slowly forming confidence in its position in your household.

When you have the puppy outside, give it whatever time it needs to settle on a spot and do what it needs to do. If you try to hurry the dog for any reason, it is likely to make it become stressed about this each time and that can cause ongoing health and behavior problems.

Some puppies will become stressed and want to go back inside before doing anything. Sometimes this is because the urge was just a false alarm but it is more likely to be a desire on the dog's part to get inside as soon as possible where it is more comfortable and there are toys and food.

Although you may be sympathetic to the dog's pleading, it's better to stay firm and make it clear that it will stay outside until there is a result.

Otherwise, your dog will try even harder almost every time in the future to get back inside.

This is another way that your leadership could be slightly damaged.

Just as with humans; the less pressure that is placed on them, the easier these tasks are accomplished.

## Urinating in the Wrong Place

Some dogs, although well trained, may start to use your home as a toilet again, either defecating or urinating, at some later time.

This is a problem which gets some of the strongest negative reactions from many dog owners. But, it is not usually a deliberate act by the dog.

There are a number of causes for the problem. They include:

- **Lack of training:** Just like human children, puppies need to be taught when and where to go. Most puppies are not with their mother long enough to get that information from her.
- **Excitement:** Puppies and some dogs tend to pee when they are excited for any reason. That might include having a game, greeting visitors or many other events.
- **Drinking too much water:** Sometimes, a dog will drink more water than it can comfortably handle and not be able to get to its regular toilet area, if it has one, in time.
- **Can't hold it long enough:** This can happen to dogs of any age if they have been involved in a game with you or your children and didn't respond to their body's urges to relieve themselves in time.
- **Submissiveness:** Dogs have a built-in tendency to acknowledge the superiority of another dog by rolling on to their back and peeing a small amount.
- **Medical problems:** Some conditions can cause dogs to be unable to always control their peeing. This is something that affects many older dogs but can start at any age. If you cannot find another very obvious cause of your dog's frequent peeing, you should check with your local vet at their next checkup. But, don't wait too long if the condition persists.

If this problem starts happening on a regular basis, get the dog checked by your vet as soon as you can to detect any medical problem or eliminate that possibility.

That will help where the problem has a medical cause.

There are treatments which may involve medicines and/or changes in lifestyle, which can often help.

If it is a behavioral problem, you may be able to work through it yourself or you may consider getting professional advice or intervention from an animal behaviorist or trainer.

Your first step should be to examine the whole situation yourself because you have more knowledge about your dog and its environment than anyone.

If the action seems to be mainly linked to the dog feeling threatened or weak (submissive behavior), this may be partly caused by the dog having a history of poor treatment before you got it.

Whatever the cause, the problem will persist unless you recognize the cause and put in extra effort and time to build the dog’s confidence and sense of security.

You will need to appear calm and supportive, no matter how upset you may feel at the incidents.

Giving the dog commands to follow and rewarding it when it does them properly can help to reduce the occurrence of the problem over time.

For the other factors, look for changes in the household which might have affected the dog either physically or psychologically. Has someone left (or died) or is there a new person or animal (or a couple) who are in the household or who have become regular visitors?

Has there been any other significant change in the dog’s surroundings, their food or their routine?

The trigger for the problem may be something that is more significant to the dog or one of the family members that it has a strong relationship to and which is not as significant in your life.

So, try to look at the situation from the dog’s point of view.

Be sure to ask all the members of your family if they have noticed any change in the dog’s behavior or its attitude. Somebody may have noticed



something which they did not attach any significance to or which you are not aware of.

Remind the other members of the family that they can help with resolving the problem by giving the dog more time, interaction and support.

They may need to greet and play with the dog in a more low-key way for a while until its confidence is restored.

## Poor Communication

One thing which causes much of the problems between dogs and their owners is that the owners and other humans expect dogs to think like we do and recognize our human body language!

And, we also tend to interpret the actions and attitudes which our dogs use as if they were done by furry humans who get around on all fours.

Body language is not a science. It’s just a bunch of indicators which we use to help us interpret attitudes and possible reactions.

We can be widely off the mark when we read other people’s body language. We need to have some experience to get even that close when we are observing the body language of a different species.

I don’t suggest that no-one can interpret a dog’s body language but we need to be able to relate the signals we see to real dog behavior.

**Shaking Hands** is a good example of how we may misinterpret a dog’s actions. A dog will offer a paw to a dog which it recognizes as having superior rank.

At other times, it might stretch both front legs forward and then lower its head as if it was bowing.

These are both recognized dog behavior but dogs don’t normally offer one raised paw as a greeting to another dog or person that they know unless they have been taught to do this. They will probably do this with other people after their first experience of the pleasant reaction which this gesture gets from the person they offered their paw.

And, they may start doing it with almost everyone they see, including family members because of the positive reaction from them just like salesmen!

You can learn to interpret the signals which they give us. If you are an owner that cares enough to try to focus on the dog’s view of things, this can be





enjoyable and a way of learning more about how to interact better with your pet and other dogs.

Spend some time with your dog just relaxing and enjoying each others company. Don't feel that you need to always be training it.

That will give you both a better understanding of how to work together so that you can make the most of your time together.

## We See Things Differently



You may have noticed that dogs' eyes are different in shape from a human's eyes.

Their vision is also quite different. It's developed to suit their needs for hunting and other important activities.

A human with good eyesight will see details and textures more clearly.

Most dogs will have a wider breadth of vision.

They won't see red and green, except in shades of those colors which their eyes are equipped to recognize; mostly grey and yellow.

But, we are much less well equipped to see in dim light. A reflecting sheet behind their eyes means they can make better use of the light which goes into their eyes than we can.

That gives them superior ability to navigate strange surroundings in low light.

They are very good at focusing on and following moving objects, especially when they are on the same level as it. That makes sense because that ability helps a wild dog in its almost constant search for its next meal.

## Do They Hear Like I Hear?



Dogs hear quite well and some breeds, such as collies which are still used for herding, have exceptional hearing which has been developed by careful breeding over many years.

But, dogs generally do not communicate more than basic messages with each other through their barking.

They have actions which are more easily understood. In your household, a dog will probably soon learn to recognize when it is being talked about or being

talked to.

At other times, it will probably let the chatter flow over it and get on with its own activities.

They can usually tell when it could be important for them to pay attention because we humans tend to use a different tone of voice according to whom we are talking to.

That’s something else which the dog’s keen hearing is useful for sorting out. If they tried to follow all our talk, they would waste a lot of time and get thoroughly confused.

They are usually much better at interpreting gestures and body posture. You can see that brought to a high level if you see sheep dog competitions or similar events.

This means that we can improve our communication and reduce the amount of misunderstanding by using clearly distinctive body postures when we want our dog to either do something or stop doing it.

## Consistency

This is one of the easiest ways to improve our interaction with our dog.

Many people are very good at making their instructions known to their dog but may use different actions or words at different times.

This reduces the effectiveness of all the training which they do and can cause serious misunderstandings at times.



One common example is when they teach their dog some action, maybe a trick, and start by rewarding the dog with a treat each time that the dog does it correctly.

Then, they stop the reward and, after a while they wonder why the dog seems to forget how to do the trick so well.

It's just like you might decide to stop doing your regular work if your boss forgot to pay you for a few weeks.

If you do teach your dog a few tricks, it's not a good idea to put the treats in its view. Many dogs will, after a while start to focus on the treats. So, keep them out of sight, in a bag for instance and take them out only when the trick is successfully completed.

## Living with Other Pets

Just as we have seen some of the difficulties that our dog has to overcome when it joins your human family, there can also be problems when there are other pets or domestic livestock also living with you.

Dogs will need supervision with any kind of animal, especially those which it might look at as possible prey.

But, very few dogs will pose major difficulties if you supervise them through the first few nervous encounters, maintain your leader authority and don't take any unnecessary chances.

### *Other dogs*



Dogs will usually work out their respective position in the family order in a fairly short time.

But, it's a good idea to keep a close eye on them if they are of different dispositions.

Large dogs will usually tolerate puppies intruding on the rest fairly well and be fairly gentle in telling them when enough is enough.

But, they may not be as easy going with a small but fully grown dog that tries to take similar liberties.

The best tactic is usually to use what you know about the background of each dog to help you decide how you will introduce them and what precautions you will take.

Make sure that you don't show obvious favoritism to the new dog or you will be inviting trouble.

Be sure to praise the resident dog for good behavior too.

### *Cats*

Dogs will need supervision with any cats but most will adapt to the situation without major problems when they understand that the cat is another member of their family with similar privileges to the dog.

Many cats will probably not accept the dog as well as they might another cat, but they will usually work out some sort of truce over time.

If the cat and dog are about the same size and temperament, they may play together fairly well after a while when they have developed a level of trust.

Take care of your cat’s interests and safety when first introducing the new dog, especially if it is large, boisterous or a hunting type.

Those dogs will require closer supervision for a long time because a single argument between the animals could be extremely dangerous.

### ***Other animals***

Again, prey animals you keep as pets must be isolated from all dogs unless you or another person the dog recognizes as an authority figure above it in the family hierarchy is present.

That said, placid dogs or especially well-trained dogs have lived in homes with other animals without incident for years.

Just remember that it is your sole responsibility to keep the other animals safe.





## Training Tips

**Reward Success, not just Attempts:** We love our pets and want to keep them happy. Sometimes, that affection works against getting the best results from our attempts to train them.

For instance, if we give them a reward because they tried but did not complete the task which we told them to do, we are putting into the dog’s mind the expectation that it can get the reward at any time without completing that task we set for it to do.



### **Build Anticipation:**

Another tactic which can improve the success of a training session is to put the reward (a packet of treats or a toy) in sight, but out of the reach of the dog a short while before you start the session. This will build a sense of anticipation in

its mind and ensure that it gives its best efforts when you start the training session.

**Keep it short:** Don’t let you or your dog become tired in a training session.

That would mean that the dog probably won’t remember what it was supposed to learn in that session.

Think about ways to make the sessions interesting for the dog and always be patient. Be quick to praise for genuine effort and slow to punish.

That way, your dog will stay interested in the training and do its best to please you every time.

## **Final Words from Murray Haven**

I hope that my book will help to ensure that you and your dog to have a long and happy relationship.

I know that my dogs have improved my life and that of my family much more than I would have thought possible.

There have, of course, been the inevitable sadness when one of them passed on but that is also part of life.

I haven't covered training in detail because there are many books, TCV shows and friends that can help you there. The biggest problem for many new dog owners is building and maintaining the relationship between them and their dog.

You will get a lot of satisfaction and enjoyment from your dog because now you can understand your faithful friend much better.

***Murray Haven***

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