

SPOILED DOGS COMPETE FOR OWNERS' ATTENTION

Dear 4Paws,

Our dogs think that they are children. Our younger pup will demand attention and, if I sit down to pet and snuggle with my other dog, she will push her way between us. She even gets between me and my husband when we snuggle. Our older dog will push my hand with his nose until he gets attention. We gently push him away and tell him no.

They act like spoiled children when it comes to wanting love. Is this really a bad thing?

- Spoiled Dogs

Dear Spoiled,

Pushy, demanding behavior like this is rude even in canine terms.

Your dogs are treating you and your husband as their possessions, not as loving and respected members of your canine-human pack. They do not think that they are children, but rather high-ranked dictators in your household. They feel they have the right to tell you when to give them attention - and you have been rewarding that behavior by giving them what they want, when they want it.

While you may not find this behavior anything more than mildly annoying, you should consider changing the rules in your household for several reasons.

First, dogs need leadership. Someone must be in charge. If you do not take this role, your dog will believe that it is his or her responsibility - and not all dogs want this role.



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If your dog is shy or fearful, being forced into a leadership role can increase their stress and lead to problem behaviors, such as aggression, separation anxiety and even housebreaking issues.

When you have more than one dog in the house, and both are treated as high-ranked members of the family, conflict can arise as the two dogs are forced to compete for the top position. Often, this can include serious, and sometimes deadly, fights.

Second, establishing yourself as leader eliminates the need for competition between multiple dogs, as you are already the highest-ranked member of the house.

Finally, if you constantly give in to your dogs' demands for attention, your dog

learns that you are in constant supply and, therefore, not of high value. So, when taking your dogs to an obedience class, dog park or other fun activity, your dogs are less likely to obey commands because you have little, to no value, compared to every dog, squirrel and blowing leaf in sight. Your dog can get your attention anytime. But to chase a squirrel...now that is rare fun!

To stop this demanding behavior, you must consistently and diligently practice your leadership exercises. This includes Nothing in Life is Free; your dogs should work for the privilege of your attention and choice spots on the furniture. It is not their right. Just as they would have to work to find food and shelter in the wild, so must they work for valuable resources in your home.

Stop responding to the pushy behavior by giving your dogs what they want. Even pushing your dog away is giving him the attention he seeks. Instead, get up and walk away from your dogs, ignoring their pushy behavior until they choose to leave you alone. Then, and only then, can you call them to you to give them attention.

The less success your dogs have with such demanding behavior, the less rewarding that behavior becomes. Pretty soon, you will once again have two, sweet, well-adjusted dogs living in your house.

Providing for your dogs' physical health is not enough. It is also up to you to provide an environment that nurtures their mental and emotional health. Doing so will give you a healthy and happy dog.