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Dollars to Dominance

If I had a dollar for every time a person told me they have a dominant dog, I would be a rich woman! Do you think your dog is "dominant"? If so, ask yourself these four questions -

1. What specific behaviors has my dog shown that caused me to think s/he's "dominant"?
2. Who is my dog dominant over?
3. If my dog is directly competing with me for something - such as space on the couch - who wins?
4. If my dog is directly competing with another dog for something - a toy, or who is going to be closest to me - who wins?

Ethology, the science of animal behavior, tells us that social dominance relates to who gives and receives certain types of communication signals, and who is likely to win in a direct competition over something important to both individuals, such as food or space.

Does your answer to the first question include such things as your dog only obeying you when she feels like it, pestering you for attention or dashing up and down the stairs ahead of you? These behaviors don't have much to do with social dominance. They are more related to the consequences for your dog. If pestering works to get your attention, your dog will continue to do it. This doesn't mean she's "dominant", it just means she knows that pestering works. Your dog may not view getting up the stairs fast as being a competition - she just may be faster and more motivated than you are!

Your answers to the last two questions likely depend on what the competition is about. For example, one dog may be able to prevent another dog from taking her bone away, but she never tries to push in to be first to be petted.

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Our Piece

How can you stop a 12 week old puppy from eating his own feces?

Good question, and unfortunately one that doesn't have a definitive answer. Eating feces is called coprophagy. Behaviorists don't fully understand why dogs do this. In some animals, such as guinea pigs, this is normal behavior and necessary for obtaining required nutrients. There is no evidence that the same is true for dogs. But it's a good idea to make sure the dog's diet is meeting his nutritional needs.

Some behaviorists and trainers we've talked to believe that puppies who are paper trained are more prone to the behavior, but it may be that paper training just provides more opportunity.

Three of our dogs - two Dalmatians and a German shorthaired pointer - have had this habit. All of them have been "chow-hounds" and very food motivated. Our other dogs, for whom food was less important, have not been coprophagic. This may be nothing more than a correlation, not a cause and effect relationship.

The most obvious answer for most dogs is to manage their world so they don't have an opportunity to eat the feces. Clean it up immediately. The other possibility is to make it taste bad by sprinkling it with Bitter Apple or any of the hot tasting deterrents that are available commercially.

Some products, such as Forbid, which

If your dog threatens you when you try to take her bone away you may have a dog who is trying to assume a dominant role in that specific situation. But she may also willingly move over or get off when you want her spot on the couch. Can your dog be "dominant" in one situation and not in another? The short answer is yes.

Rather than thinking of "dominance" as a personality trait, think of it as one of several roles your dog can assume in a social interaction. Contrary to what much of the popular literature says, dogs are not incorrigible, unrelenting status seekers. Most dogs are predisposed to give in, or acquiesce, to people. Relatively few dogs are willing to use aggressive behavior against people to get what they want. The dogs we see are more likely to use threats and aggression for defensive reasons, when they are fearful and feel threatened by people, rather than to be a pushy bully.

There is a consensus among many behaviorists that misconceptions about dominance have had bad consequences for dogs. Having to be "dominant" over your dog has been justification for alpha rolls and scruff shakes, painful punishments, and depriving dogs of their need to exert a reasonable amount of control over their world.

To learn more about dominance and other confusing but commonly used concepts and ideas such as drives, "nature versus nurture", and whether behaviors can be "inherited", sign up for our [Fundamentals of Canine Ethology Telecourse](#). You are sure to come away with new perspectives on your dog's behavior that will allow you to create a happier, healthier relationship with your canine friend. Your dog would sign you up if s/he could! Check out the [Behavior Articles](#) section on our website as well - there are several on the topic of dominance.

Cat Piece

Is Your Feline Fussy About her Litterbox?

Are you one of the scores of cat owners who are frustrated by your cat's inconsistent litterbox habits? Few cats stop using the litterbox altogether, but the cats we work with are, on a semi-regular basis, either urinating or defecating outside the box or both.

Some cats are pretty flexible about what they'll use for a bathroom area. We keep our cat Buffett's litterboxes down in the basement, behind the washer-dryer. We wouldn't recommend this location to our clients. In fact, we've told people to move boxes from similar locations when their cats weren't using them consistently. Buffett however, doesn't seem to mind them there. He's never soiled the house, not once.

While individual cats may have unique needs when it comes to litterboxes, there do seem to be a few essential elements for them to be acceptable to most cats. Most cats prefer to relieve themselves on things that feel soft under their feet. Grass or dirt

are sprinkled on the dog's food, are supposed to make his feces taste bad. These products are inconsistent - they seem to work for some dogs but not others.

In cases where coprophagy has become a health issue - when a dog would come inside the house and vomit them up - we've used a [remote citronella spray training collar](#) to punish the behavior. This requires you to constantly monitor your dog whenever he's got the chance to eat "poop" and activate the collar the instant he shows any interest in doing so. Most people are unwilling to be this dedicated for the week or so it takes to convince the dog that "poop" always has a mean side! We wouldn't recommend this approach for a puppy however. Learn a bit more about this behavior by [clicking here](#) to reach an article on our website.

New Research on Flying With Fido

If you've ever had to fly your dog you've probably worried about whether he'd be better off sedated. I've only flown one of my dogs one time. This was over 20 years ago when I flew my German shorthaired pointer from Denver to Phoenix for an obedience trial.

I and two of my friends watched in horror from the gate area as our dogs were loaded onto the conveyor belt to the hold - with one dog's crate upside down! My friend ran through the Exit door that says "Do not enter or alarm will sound" - which it did - right on to the tarmac.

Today of course, she would have been in handcuffs on the ground immediately. But back then she made it all the way to the baggage handlers. We could see her screaming and gesturing wildly at them, but she got them to right the crate! And we all made it to Phoenix safely. I don't remember how we did in the obedience trial!

A recent study reported in the Canadian Journal of Veterinary Research found that when being transported by air, dogs are better off not being medicated. This study was the first to objectively measure both behavioral and physiological

outside, as compared to gravel or cement. Clothes, beds or carpets inside if the litter doesn't have a soft feel to it.

If this describes your cat, switch to a fine-grained litter that will have a softer feel. Be careful not to put too much litter in the box. An inch or two is sufficient for most cats. They don't seek out piles of dirt in the wild, just a little loose soil.

If your cat isn't using her box reliably, it may not be meeting her behavioral needs. The most common reasons for litterbox problems are a combination of a litterbox aversion, and surface and location preferences. It's not always obvious what it is about the box that your cat doesn't like, but once she decides that the litterbox isn't to her liking, it won't take long for her to develop new preferences for where, and on what she likes to relieve herself.

In these situations, our goal during a consultation is to analyze the differences between the litterbox area and the soiled areas. We want to make the litterbox and its surroundings more like the soiled areas, which are apparently meeting your cat's behavioral needs better.

In addition to type and depth of litter, location, size and number of boxes, whether the box has a cover, and how clean you keep it are other litterbox elements that must be taken into account in creating a box your cat will like. Your best defense against a litterbox problem is to build a cat friendly litterbox. Our booklet [Cats Come Clean: What Your Cat Wants You to Know About Litterboxes](#) tells you how to do just that.

If you aren't sure what your cat likes best, give him several boxes to choose from, which differ only in one respect. Put two identical litterboxes in different locations. Or put two next to each other with different litters and see what your cat uses most.

You'll find more information about litterboxes on our website under [Cat Problems](#), and in several [Behavior Articles](#). For a more comprehensive education, take our [Cat Behavior Wellness Telecourse](#), or schedule a [consultation](#) with us if your cat really has you stumped.

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responses to the stress of air transport. The researchers studied a group of non-sedated dogs and those given acepromazine, a drug commonly used to sedate dogs in many situations. We often encounter dogs who have been sedated with "ace" for thunderstorm phobias.

The study showed clearly that dogs were stressed by air transport - certainly something most of us would assume - but now it's been documented objectively. The results showed that acepromazine did not reduce any of the behavioral or physiological stress parameters measured in the study. The most stressful parts of transport were the loading and unloading procedures - certainly true in my experience!

You should make sure your dog is well acclimated to his crate as well as the crate being picked up and jostled a bit, before flying your dog. Our video-[Crate Training the Right Way](#) - tells you how. Never fly your dog with toys or food because they present a choking hazard and if he becomes air sick you don't want him having to lie in a mess. You might be interested in - [Companion Air](#) - a company working on developing flight services that allow pets to be in the cabin with their owners.

Thanks to Dr. Christine Wilford and her article in the August issue of the AKC Gazette for the summary of the research study.

What's New at ABA

Release the balloons! Open the champagne! ABA's expanded website launched on schedule on September 2. When you visit our new site, you'll find literally hundreds of [short articles](#) on all kinds of behavior topics, based on the columns we've written for the Rocky Mountain News for many years. These are in downloadable, PDF format. Feel free to use them in your own publications - just follow our easy terms of use policies that are clearly explained.

Soon to come are longer, downloadable [Behavior Wellness Reports](#) on everything from litterboxes to coprophagy (don't know what that

is? - Look in the Our Piece section). We are sure you'll find them valuable, either as a pet owner or as a group or organization looking for quality handouts. Already in PDF format, they are ready to download and print.

We are extremely excited about the new services we've added - our telecourses in particular. Telecourses are our answer to the requests we've been besieged with for cost effective, easily accessible trainings and seminars. Better than attending a conference and sitting in an audience of several hundred people, with our telecourses, it will be like having us give a presentation to you in your very own living room - and have time for discussion and questions as well.

Animal professionals from veterinarians to pet sitters will want to sign up for our [Fundamentals of Canine Behavior](#) and [Fundamentals of Animal Learning](#) courses.

And if you are a new pet owner, or just want to better your relationship with your canine or feline friend, sign up for our [Just Behave OR What Your Cat Wants You to Know](#) Telecourses. All have low, introductory prices which we can't guarantee will be the same for future sessions. Go to Services for Pet Owners or Services for Professionals and click on Telecourses to sign up.

About Our Services

Thanks to all of you who took the time to drop us an email about the newsletter. We sincerely appreciate your positive feedback, and suggestions on topics you'd like to read about. We take your input seriously and strive to keep our newsletter interesting and useful. So keep in touch! Our email address is ezine@animalbehaviorassociates.com. We are changing our internet service provider this month (for emails, not web hosting), so if you encounter any problems, please resend in a day or so. If you've ever had to do it, you know that Murphy's Law applies when making this kind of change. We appreciate your patience with us!

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