



Corrections

Dogs are pack animals and function as such whether they are living with a human pack or a dog pack. A pack generally consists of 3 or more animals. There is ALWAYS a leader, and therefore there must ALWAYS be followers. The leader calls the shots, and the followers – follow.

Humans have a huge problem with canine behavior and one of the predominant issues is correcting their dog for bad, or unacceptable behavior. Most of the problems I've seen stem from the way people correct their dogs. For some reason people think that explaining something to a dog over and over again will somehow eventually make sense to the dog. The problem with this theory is that unless you show him what something means, the true meaning doesn't just present itself through the ether. I've seen people make mistakes by correcting a dog too strongly before the dog has a clue what he's doing wrong. Correcting too strong or too weak are both huge mistakes. A dog should clearly understand what we expect of him. If he refuses to do what is expected / asked of him, and we are clear he knows what that is, we can deliver a correction.

Before going any further, I'd like to add the right way to approach corrections is not to have to use them in the first place. That is to say, we can lure a dog into a desired behavior by using a treat or a toy much better than by using a correction. I prefer at any point to use positive based training whenever possible. It is the rare occasion when this type of training doesn't work and we are dealing with an obstinate dog that requires some sort of compulsion-based or correction-based training. To swear by one method or another 100% is ignorant and short sighted. A good trainer is fair and understands what is fair to the particular dog. ***All training must be fair to the dog.***

Before we begin giving a dog a correction we should have laid the foundation to building a relationship with him. Corrections are given to a dog to teach him right from wrong and if we have not spent the time to cement a bond with him, chances are he is not able to learn from us just yet.

A common problem is infusing emotions into corrections and this is very confusing to a dog. Dogs do not function in an emotional world. Emotions in corrections confuse a dog and can undo any good that the correction could possibly deliver in the first place.

Corrections are delivered quickly, fairly, firmly and WITHOUT emotion.

If you have to continue to correct a dog over and over, there are a couple of things to look at: One is that the dog does not understand what is being asked of him and what he's being corrected for, and the other is the correction was not firm enough if the dog is acting out of dominance. More than likely though it is that the dog is unclear, due to poor communication between the handler and the dog.

If your correction is not firm enough, (many dogs will take a slight tug on the leash as a sign of playing) the dog will begin to engage the handler with more and more playing. Humans see this behavior as being *naughty*. The dog is only acting out of his instinct and the handler should re-visit the correction he just delivered. At this point the untrained handler will keep on correcting the dog and will dive, head first, into "nagging corrections." Once a handler goes down this path it usually goes on for the entire life of the dog, and I can tell you from experience that this dog is miserable, as is the handler. It is better to deliver one well-timed and well-executed correction onto a dog that will remind him and correct him one time. After that he is clear on what is expected of him and usually the problem will be solved quickly and fairly. A correction should land on top of the problem to squash it, not underneath it to drive the problem up more and more. If you are afraid of delivering too powerful of a correction, chances are you are not capable of giving your dog the correction he needs. These types of FIRM corrections are ONLY used for serious aggression, and dominant based aggression.

Corrections are delivered at the end of a leash using a choke, prong or (rarely) remote collar. For the people who wince when they see a correction, they should understand that they are dealing with a dog that is used to grabbing or being grabbed by the neck and wrestled to the ground. You cannot deliver a memorable correction to a dog on a gentle leader type collar or harnesses... please do not even try. In fact I would say that correcting a dog on a gentle leader type collar might be the most dangerous thing you could do to your dog. I have no place for these collars.

If your dog has no clue what he is being corrected for, it is highly unfair to correct him. That is not to say that we need to explain every single thing we want our dog to know to him, it means simply teaching him what NO means. Please read **The Binary Dog** article to understand how to properly teach this concept to your dog. Simply put, NO means that he is not allowed to do a specific thing.

**** a quick note on corrections.** Corrections for obedience are very different than corrections for aggression or dominance. A correction for obedience should be delivered in a way that will teach the dog the right thing to do and will guide him toward the right action. For example, if a dog does not sit when asked (and we assume he knows that sit means sit), we can correct him by pushing down on his lower back or popping up on the leash. After the dog completes the correct action, we praise the dog. A dog that is being

corrected for aggression does not receive praise after the correction is delivered. Furthermore, corrections for aggression should be more firmly delivered than corrections for obedience. Remember that a correction for obedience is merely correcting a dog by moving him into the proper place to perform what we are asking him to do.

The single biggest mistake people make with correcting their dogs is the timing of the correction. If you can't get the correction delivered in less than 2 seconds from the time your dog did not complete the task or acted, do NOT give the correction. I hate seeing people rub a dog's nose in poop when they come home, or a dog that runs away and eventually comes back and then he gets a whack for coming back. Dogs do NOT understand what they *did* wrong if they have done something else after the first mistake. Also, dogs do NOT remember what they did wrong after 2 seconds. So, the 2-second rule is: **Correct the dog immediately or FORGET IT!** A good handler knows when he is defeated and lets it go. There are plenty of times that I could not deliver a correction in time, so I let it go and moved on to the next exercise. Often times I was able to set the dog up into the same situation later and then was able to correct him.

The reason we correct dogs is not to bully them, but to teach them. We want our dog to succeed, so our corrections should be focused on that. Correcting a dog over and over again is a sign of a very inexperienced handler, or a dog that has absolutely no respect for his handler / human. It is also very important to note that ***dogs should not be corrected by someone they do not see as a fair leader.*** For example, allowing a child to correct a dog can be a dangerous act. It is likely that a dog may challenge a correction and if you cannot back it up, you're gonna lose. And, if you lose, eventually you will put your dog at risk for being killed if he bites. Corrections, properly timed and properly delivered are fair, as they strengthen and structure a cohesive relationship between them and us. Dogs do not see us as jerks for correcting them, so it's important not to be a jerk when you correct your dog. It is imperative that we share the goal of "wanting our dog to succeed" before we begin to deliver the first correction. When a correction is properly delivered it fixes the problem, the dog is praised and thereby the dog is very happy.

On a closing note, there are some things to watch for when correcting dogs. The most important one is that we must never over train the dog. If we spend more than 10-15 minutes training, the dog is on overload. We teach one new thing / trick / behavior to a dog and then give him a rest. We ALWAYS end training sessions on a positive note. We NEVER put the dog away after he has failed in training. This will create a dog that will never succeed and will never form a strong bond with his human. If a dog begins to shake himself off (as he would when getting out of the water) or yawn excessively, chances are he's stressed. One thing I suggest is to always keep a couple of treats in your pocket, even if you are not using them in training. Offer one to the dog periodically and watch his reaction. If the dog refuses to eat, chances are your corrections are too strong or the dog is going down in spirit. When this happens, take a break. Take a few minutes to just chill out.

Dog training should be the most fun and eventful thing for the dog (and of course for the human). If your dog sees training as gloom and doom, he will never do what you want

him to do in the spirit that he should do it. The best-trained dogs enjoy completing an action for the handler because they respect the handler... and in the dog world ***Respect means LOVE***. Even dogs that are corrected enjoy the act of learning something new. It's similar to an athlete that learns and grows from grueling and challenging experiences.

Dog training has inherent risks. I urge you to research and consult a professional for training advice.

Please visit my animal rescue organization and consider supporting our important work:
<http://www.boundangels.org>

All writings are ©2009 Robert Cabral – not to be reproduced without permission
www.blackbeltdogtraining.com