

Small Dog Syndrome - How to Stop a Small Dog Behaving Badly

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To get an understanding of the problem, we need to begin at the beginning. All puppies are cute and adorable, even the largest breed was small and cuddly at one time. However, the small breeds tend to retain their puppy looks and size, long after the cute Rottweiler puppy has grown and gained 50 Kg in weight, for instance

Researchers have found that humans have developed a biological response to 'cute' things, especially baby animals. It is thought the need to nurture and protect, perceived defenseless creatures is automatic.

This is where problems often begin; the owner over protects the dog, may carry him round, let him sleep on the bed or jump on the furniture when he chooses, and picks him up in the presence strange dogs, and gives in to his demands for attention. This is often done through the misguided notion that the dog needs protecting, by virtue of his size and 'baby like' qualities.

So how is this all worked out in the dogs mind? Although our domestic dogs are very different in many ways to his ancestor, the wolf, he has inherited much of his ancestors instinctual behaviors. A part of this instinctual blue print, comes the desire to be part of a group or pack. Although most dogs are more than happy to be the follower in their human pack, if their is no obvious leader, or the dog is getting signals from his owner that he is the leader of the pack, then the dog will have no option but to fill the role, as this is how life is played out in the dogs world.

Over time, the dog may show behaviors that to the experienced eye would be considered dominant, however, to the dogs owner these behaviors are seen as either breed specific, for example, 'that's how Chihuahuas's are', or part and parcel of the dogs personality, eg 'he's always been this way'. This kind of behavior would be a cause for concern if seen in a larger dog, but somehow overlooked, or not considered serious in many smaller breeds.

There are a number of behaviors that are common to small dogs acting dominantly, so much so, that this type of behavior observed in smaller breeds, has inherited the label 'small dog syndrome' or 'little dog syndrome'. Some of the common behaviors that characterize 'small dog syndrome' are listed below.

- Your dog has developed the habit of sitting on you, or jumping on you, or next to you, when he pleases.
- Your dog does not allow you near him when he is eating or has a toy he is playing with
- Your barks excessively to get your attention.
- Your dog is over protective when other dogs or humans come near you.
- Your dog growls when you attempt to move him from his favorite resting place.
- Your dog is generally stubborn and refuses to follow commands given to him.
- Your dog displays an exaggerated reaction to being left alone, characterized by constant barking, or destructive behavior.

Much can be done to turn this problem around, however, owners must first consider the role they play in encouraging this type of behavior in their dogs. Owners must come to realize that their small breed dogs are in fact animals and not little humans.

Secondly, owners must understand that it is natural for dogs to be a part of a 'pack' and more importantly, a pack in which they would much prefer to be a follower, than a leader. Understanding these two concepts alone, will help greatly reduce the problem.

In terms of retraining, owners must communicate to their dogs that they are the leader, provider, and protector of the team. This can be done by controlling all of the dogs resources, for example, food, toys, treats, walks, and favorite places of rest, and allowing the dog access to them when the owner decides.

All demanding behavior, for example barking for treats or to be picked up and so on, should be ignored, and all appropriate behavior praised.

Aggressive and possessive behavior towards other humans by the dog can be dealt with by having a place for the dog to go to when the owner is interacting with others. This may be to his crate, or a cushion in the corner of the room for example.

Owners should be aware that retraining takes time, especially in the case of dogs who have been allowed to display this kind of behavior for a long time. With patience and repetition however, the dog will be content to become a follower, rather than the leader, of his human pack.