

THINK DOG

Your dog sees the world differently than we do. If we learn to “think dog”, we can avoid some kinds of trouble (especially with dogs and small children) and communicate with our dogs more easily.

- To a dog, a pat on the head can be a sign of dominance. Scratching a dog on the chest or at the base of the tail is often more enjoyable to the dog. Stroking motions or scratches are more pleasant than a ‘thump thump’ pat.
- Hugging is stressful to a lot of dogs. We can teach dogs to enjoy being hugged by pairing a short hug with a small treat and praise.
- Direct eye contact can be threatening to a dog. If your dog is shy, averting your eyes can make her more comfortable. There is a big difference between a stare and pleasant eye contact, so smile when you look at your dog.
- Dogs are naturally possessive – some more so than others. In dog-dom, possession is 9/10 of the law. It is natural for a dog to be reluctant to give up a prized possession. Be proactive – give your dog something that is okay for her to have and “trade” it for a yummy treat. Then give the item back to the dog. Read my article on Teaching Give. Get help if your dog is growling – do not force the issue.
- Dogs are opportunists and natural scavengers. This was a survival trait. If it is edible and unattended – to the dog it is up for grabs. Read my article on Management and set your dog up for success. Also read Counter surfing.
- Dogs do not have a sense of “right” and “wrong”. They do have a very well developed sense of “pleasant” and “unpleasant”. To a dog, there is no moral ground, there is only feels good, or feels bad!
- Dogs live in the present time. Forget about punishing your dog for what she has done earlier – she will not understand. She WILL understand that you are upset with her, but she won’t understand WHY. When you are angry at your dog, she will respond by acting submissively – this is not guilt, it is an attempt to appease you with her body language.

If we learn how to “Think Dog”, we can have an easier time of understanding our canine companions.

It is a good idea to know the signs of stress in a dog too – read my article on Stress Signs.