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## Role Reversal in Puppies

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**The most common behavioral questions we get, with regard to puppies, is about proper socialization. Why do some puppies grow up to love all dogs for their whole life and some only until they reach around 9 to 10 months then far too often become a jerk to other dogs? The answer lies in role reversal.**

Puppies learn role reversal as soon as they begin to play, at about 2 to 3 weeks of age. They learn it with their brothers and sisters in their litter. They continue to learn it until well into their 7th to 8th month of adolescence. Role Reversal is the act of a puppy learning who they are in this big world. They learn sometimes they can be the boss of the other pups and sometimes the other pups are the boss of them. Sometimes pup #1 sits on pup#2's head and sometime it's the other way around! At this age, its all FUN! You see, puppies do not know who they are yet; they do not know their role in the pack. They rely on other puppies to tell them. They try different roles out. With back and forth play they learn how to let the other dog gain the upper hand and allow themselves to be put in their place as well as learn what its like to be the more assertive one. This builds their confidence and they become very predictable dogs. Without role reversal your pup never learns how to give and take when it comes to play.

Far too often, we get the phone call " Well, no, my puppy did not play with others his own age but we did take him to the dog park everyday and he played with tons of dogs, and now he is a jerk to other dogs"

The problem with this is that the pup never learned role reversal. Adult dogs already know who they are. Strong/assertive? Calm/Submissive? A bully? A cheerleader? A follower? A leader? and the pup was never allowed to find out who he was... since everyone else only told him who he was not! This can even happen when adult dogs play beautifully well with out puppies...

When puppies primarily play with adult dogs that are secure in who they are, the pup never gets the chance to try on "different hats" and their hat is already chosen for them by the adult dogs. This makes for a VERY low confidence dog, and at 9 to 10 months that shows its ugly head as a bully. The phone call is all too common. "we used to go to the dog park all the time, but now he gets into scuffles with the other dogs. He is great with some dogs, but we never know when he will go off on another dog"

This is not to say your pup won't play perfectly well with an adult dog. But your pup is learning to play like an adult dog... not a puppy. This is the EXACT opposite of what we need your pup to do.

### What to do?

If you have a pup less than 25 weeks of age, it's an easy fix. Time consuming? yes... but simple. Your pup should be playing with only other pups ages 9 weeks to 6 months. At least 80% of the dogs in his life should be puppies. No exceptions. don't say you don't know any other puppies, FIND THEM. Your pup is already developmentally behind, you need to find at least 5 new pups a week. Size means

nothing, its all about age.

Trade phone numbers in your puppy kindergarten class, send an email to all your friends asking if they know anyone with a puppy.... this is your dogs life we are talking about. You need to take initiative.

**Remember your pup CANNOT be exposed to other pups whose health history you don't know. Since your pup may not fully vaccinated you need to ask about the other pups health history. Get proof they are as current as they can be on vaccines.**

Is your dog older than 6 months but less than 10 months? Its gets more tricky now. You need to find pups ages 5 months to 8 months. A harder group to find, but still very doable. **STOP going to the dog park** where it's any ones guess who will be showing up. Make sure the pups you set up play dates with are social dogs already going to obedience school in a reward based class. You do not want to make things worse by having your dog learn bad behaviors from someone else.

Is your dog older than 10 months? Best thing now is to realize your dogs personality is set, we have to respect who they are, if they are not happy with every kind of dog. Don't put your dog in unpredictable situations (like a dog park) Find dogs your dog plays really well with. Set up play dates with those dogs. Trade dog care back and forth with those dogs. Have play dates at your house or theirs. Stop putting your dog in situations where they may show inappropriate behavior. Get into a reward based class to continue learning good manners. Your dog is still capable of learning how to behave, but not capable of changing their personality.

Know it's all about prevention. You have the ability to make your dog a fabulous dog. But remember... good dogs do not happen by accident!

