

Social Structure - Exiting and Entering Doors

Establishing an appropriate social structure for the dog within the home is critical to avoiding future dog behavior problems. From the dog's point of view, whoever goes through the door (house, car, fence, etc.) first is the leader, and most dogs think all door holes (house, car, gate, etc.) were made for them to go into or out of FIRST!

In our adoption kennel, our volunteers begin teaching the dogs to allow people into and out of their runs without trying to escape or bolt out the door. They also learn to say "please" by sitting before they can go through, in or out, any solid door—i.e, sit makes the door open.

Pictured above is Care Cadet Ashley, manually placing Annie into a sit position by holding onto her collar at the top of her neck with one hand; placing the other hand/wrist behind her knees; gently pulling the collar along her back toward her rear, putting soft pressure on the muscles in back of her legs, and folding her into a sit position. This manual placement also conditions Annie for handling of her body. Do not press down on the dog's rear as there is a possibility of injuring the dog if he resists the downward pressure.

This should apply to car doors and gates also. The dog should learn to SIT-STAY, while you open the car door, until you release him to enter the car. Also the dog should learn to STAY, while you open the car door, until you hook up the leash and release him to exit the car.

The obvious progression of this training with the dog is that the on-going training escalates to having them stay seated, while their owner/handler steps out the door, until verbally released from their sit position, to either go with you or to stay inside the house.

Since we do not usually have the dogs at the shelter long enough to reach this heightened training goal, that next progression of training should be part of the new owner's goal for the dog to begin establishing an appropriate social structure within his/her new home.

For behavior modification assistance, contact the Humane Society's Pet Behavior Help Line, 388-3331, Ext. 19, or www.hsvb.org (Pet Behavior downloads).

The Humane Society offers three Puppy & Dog Training Classes each week—Wednesday at 11AM, Thursday at 7PM and Saturday at 1 PM. The class is a 6-week session; each once-a-week class is about 1 hour. For information contact Connie at 772-388-3331, Ext. 19.