

Dogs, Humans, and Behavior

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Humans and dogs have enjoyed intimate relationships for thousands of years, sharing food, shelter, and companionship. In the course of this mutual history, we have trained dogs to perform a variety of commands for a myriad of functions from herding to obedience work in a show ring. Dogs seem to have the ability to understand us, anticipate us, and sometimes train us in return based on what seems to be an intuitive understanding of human beings. However, many of the signals we use to communicate our intentions to dogs are not intuitive to them and may in fact mean the opposite of what we intend. It is to dogs' credit that they learn to interpret our intentions, signals, and commands despite these cultural differences, while many of us fail to recognize our breaches of social etiquette towards them. Understanding the basics of dog communication and working through our misconceptions can promote safer, more satisfying interactions for members of both species, and make dog training much easier.