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Pack animal myth.

Trend by [Cindy Ludwig](#),

MA; BS; RN; pro dog trainer; behavior consultant in animal behavior - a most viewed writer in [Dog TrainingCindy](#).

Do your dog think it's the dominant Alpha of the house?

Not all domesticated dog breeds are pack animals not by a mile.

The APBT breeding goals and principals specifically tends for a well-tempered working dog on a one to one basis ... not as a pack animal as many ignorantly may proclaim.

This idea that the APBT being "pack animals" and need a "pack leader" is a misguided notion that has resulted in serious harm to countless yard dogs and the human-animal bond.

Owners of real game bred APBT's know this by experience.
Treating APBT as pack animals has been unethically promoted by *National Geographic* and by "some TV "dog trainers" which has apparently valued profit over truth and ethical reporting and this also failed to be proven by the "dog whisperer."

It was once assumed that the domesticated dogs were pack animals, based on the observation of captive wolf and other wild dog packs in which there was a pack hierarchy - still like that in the wild today - with alpha male and female at the top.

Any perceived weakness in these wolves and wild dog families resented an opportunity for lower ranking wolves or wild dogs to compete for one of those top leadership alpha roles – for eating and mating rights, this we see on TV and such info do make an impact.

The problem is, we now know that the social structure of non-captive wolves is not the same as it is for captive wolves, and that wolves and wild dog packs in the wild consist of a pack of family, versus unrelated members.

It is therefore inappropriate to refer to these wolves as anything other than the breeding pair or parent wolves since they do not compete with their offspring for resources – the same with the APBT.

In fact, wolves in the wild demonstrate strong family ties and cooperative relationships.

Read up or listen to world-renowned wolf biologist, and founder of the International Wolf Center, Dr. L. David Mech on the term, alpha: - Google this and be amazed.

From this erroneous assumption about wolf pack structure, regardless of whether the wolves in question were captive or not, sprung the notion that all dogs, since they are descendants of wolves, must also be pack animals.

This gave rise to the outdated and dangerous notion that these so-called "pack animals" need a "pack leader," and from there, people grasped tightly onto the concept of being a "pack leader" to *show the dog who is boss* and to believe your claim to control or be the pack leader will prevent your APBT in grouped related situations.

The American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior has published a [*Position Statement on the Use of Dominance in the Behavior Modification of Animals*](#) that you should read – this is not just a story but proven information.

Jean Donaldson, founder of the Academy for Dog Trainers, has also addressed the subject of whether dogs are pack animals in her blog entry,

[*Are Dogs Pack Animals?*](#)

Countless other qualified experienced professional APBT dog trainers and behaviorists have written on the subject to try and correct this dangerous and outdated meme - myth.

Dr. Ray Coppinger, a well-known dog biologist and his wife are the authors of a book which is recommend you read, [*Dogs: A Startling New Understanding of Canine Origin, Behavior & Evolution.*](#)

Also for further reading is recommend, *Dog Sense: How the New Science of Dog Behavior Can Make You A Better Friend to Your Pet* by [John Bradshaw](#),

The Culture Clash by Jean Donaldson, and *Don't Shoot the Dog* by Karen Pryor.

Please also refer to the *International Wolf*, a publication of the International Wolf Center that Dr. L. David Mech founded, on [What Ever Happened to the Term, Alpha? \(Winter 2008 edition, page 4\).](#)

So, in answer to the question, "Is it bad to let your dog think it is the dominant of the house?"

First of all, more than 9 times out of 10, your dog is not thinking it is the dominant member of the household, but rather, testing their boundaries and simply untrained – this is a dog thing.

The domesticated dog today needs guidance and structure, and you most certainly do not need to accomplish this through any kind of force or intimidation.

A [research study conducted by the University of Pennsylvania in 2009](#) demonstrated that confrontational dog training methods lead to aggression.



The American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior concurs. In addition to the organizations position statement on dominance, it has published other position statements, including one cautioning against [the use of punishment in behavior modification](#).

The American College of Animal Behaviorists advises against trainers who use choke chains, prong collars, shock, leash corrections, forced downs, alpha rolls, scuffing, kneeling the dog in the chest or abdomen, pinching the toes, hitting, yelling, choking, helicoptering, [and those who advise owners to be the alpha and explain behavior in terms of dominance.](#)



10 Problems With Punishment

1. It inhibits learning.
2. It can lead to aggression.
3. It is very difficult to execute effectively.
4. It doesn't teach the dog what to do.
5. It doesn't stop the reinforcement for the unwanted behavior.
6. It can increase behavior if applied inconsistently.
7. The animal can grow used to the punishment so that higher and higher levels of intensity are required.
8. The animal can develop unintended associations with the punishment, for example, other animals or people.
9. It is disempowering for the animal.
10. It is habit-forming for the punisher.

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In the words of *Dr. Grey Stafford*, "Training should be about helping animals succeed in the world we've created for them, not boosting our egos."

By far the most effective and efficient way to train any animal (realize your dog is an animal) to do anything – your choice - it is physically able to do is [clicker training](#), which is based on the science of how animals learn and behave.

To read more about positive reinforcement training in general, please read one or both of the following articles:

[Positive Reinforcement Training. What is it?](#) – read this

[Positive Reinforcement Training: What it is and Why it Works](#) – read this!

You may also find this guest blog helpful in understanding the different types of training:

[*The Different Theories of Training Explained*](#) – read this!



[*Cindy Ludwig*](#)

Quality manager, RN, professional adult educator and certified pro dog trainer

[Most Viewed in Dog Training, Puppies, Dog Behavior, and 21 more](#) – read this!

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