



South View
Hooks Drove
Morrow
PE13 4HH
01945 701706
lee@dogsmind.com

Pack Therapy

What is it and how can it help?

Pack therapy is a process of utilising a controlled pack of dogs to influence a restructure of learning within a single dog.

Dogs are of course pack animals and as such have developed an intense and specific means of communication. This communication has intricacies far more developed than which us humans have adopted and now settled on utilising. Our language is heavily based on the verbal structure of sounds, with a small amount of physical hand gesturing and body language inclusion set to emphasise our verbal pathway. The canine language equally utilises sounds or verbal structure but with more emphasis on body language and physical gesture. The physical may be utilised in conjunction with verbal but in the most part, communication is predominantly physical. Minute changes in a facial expression, the drop or wag of a tail, posturing and motion all play a part and every dog needs to maintain an ability to instinctively know all that the canine language encompasses. The canine language is universal, it crosses differences in canine species and there is no dialect or accent issues to deal with, it is just "The Canine Language".

In addition to the language barrier there is also the combination of rules within the pack around behaviour and requirement to respect the expectations of hierarchical position within a pack. Rules are set to encourage harmonious relationships within each pack that must be adhered to by each individual animal or, when leadership roles are contested, there must equally be a knowledge of consequences and coping strategies that must be learnt and maintained in order that following any confrontations, calmness can once again settle within the pack in order that life for the pack can continue.

A strong pack with rules, boundaries and controls coupled with clear and concise expectations creates a unity of cohesion and promotes a successful group that is able to survive in a manner of positivity and understanding. Each pack will have its leaders and its subordinates, and it is this structure that enable the pack to ensure its survival.

As pet dog owners we generally have little understanding of the structures and importance of roles within a pack and can quickly cloud the understanding of the dog's natural language in preference to teaching and encouraging "human" attributes.

A pet dog that cannot speak its own doggy language will have difficulties in interactions with other dogs, people and externally influenced stimuli and may learn behaviours detrimental to its own integration when confronted with the occasional meeting in the park or on a walk in the street. It may develop issues of acceptance when visitors enter into its home and may never learn acceptable coping strategies in order to reduce anxieties or reactive responses.

Pack therapy provides a means to re teach the dog its own language, to become comfortable in the presence of other dogs and to therefore become more manageable should a situation occur.

When a puppy is born, it is not by chance that it will usually be accompanied by a number of litter mates, brothers and sisters all born around the same time. Each puppy has a role of learner and teacher within that litter as they grow and experience choices and frustrations in early life.

A dog pack is not just a ramble of individual animals merrily going about their day with complete disregard for any other entity. The pack is structured with specific rules and regulations that, in order for the pack survival, must be learnt and the lessons adhered to. Hunting, feeding, security all have a part in the pack structure, without inter dog cooperation the survival of the pack is extremely unlikely and therefore of paramount importance.

As humans we have a tendency to "Anthropomorphise" our human ways onto our dog and to judge our dog of our own human understandings of compassion, jealousy, play etc and make the assumption that the dog fully understands our ways. It doesn't and it never will.

"my dog loves me, every time I return home after a period of time- he gives me kisses and gets so excited" a human interpretation of a much more fundamental action of pack language. In reality the action described is the action of a juvenile dog "greeting" the return of the hunting elder and in anticipation of food the dog is programmed to seek nourishment. In order to retrieve the fallen prey which is held within the elder dogs gullet, it will need to insert its tongue deep into the mouth of the returning dog in order to promote a gagging reflex and induce vomiting, the result of which will be eaten by a pup. In this instance there is no "kissing" just a desire to feed based on dog language and behaviour.

Just one example of where we create conflicts of understanding with our pet dogs.

It is important to understand the relationship being established with the new dog and how it fits into a new pack scenario. Dogs are pack animals; they understand by instinct the nature of the pack

structure and they can be clearly defined within that structure. A family pet dog has a structure established within the family unit and utilises its instincts to order and maintain each day. When the owner arrives to drop off a dog it can be stated that an established pack (owner-dog) is presenting to another established pack. Two packs meeting can cause a disruption displayed as protection or fear and may result in a negative interaction. This is why owners will not be permitted into the pack area as doing so will be seen instinctually as a potential threat to each pack. However, a lone dog, presenting without a pack, isolated and alone will immediately assume a low-ranking position and respond accordingly. The dog will feel the need to establish a position within a new pack and by adopting a low-ranking demeanour will be more readily accepted by the established pack. We utilise this instinct, create a high-ranking position for ourselves and then introduce the dogs based on that established hierarchy. When the dogs are collected by the owner, this will be seen as a regrouping and the dog will readily return to its established pack as it had been on its arrival.

Dogs cannot speak human; we must speak dog.

Pack therapy can help with most if not all dog interaction issues and can aid the dog's ability to mix successfully with other dogs, re learning the language, the structure and security of the pack.

As a consequence of pack therapy and the understanding of the pack language, we as owners, trainers and end users can induce the pack drive resident within each dog to harness behaviours to assist our work, our training and our continued fostering of all that comes from dog ownership. But it is for us to understand the dog, not for the dog to understand and conform to our social, emotional and most times chaotic existence.

The "Pack Therapy" programme is a training programme aimed at supporting our pet dogs, it gives opportunity for dogs to maintain or re-learn associated actions of all canine language elements and relationship or hierarchy elements in a way that supports their future interactions with other dogs and inevitably with other humans. It enhances the training possibilities to encourage a successful coexistence between us and our canine companions and greatly reduces any inter dog reactivity whether based on fear, aggression or exuberance.

The services offered by the business are not based on the concept of daycare or boarding but on training and our services should be understood as such by our clients. Pack therapy forms the foundation of all instances here at South View. It is the mainstay of our service provided under the realms of our doggy day car and boarding provision and is managed and maintained through our involvement with our training provision through Dogsmind Limited, a provider, supporter and instructor of dog behaviour and pack therapy.