

## Spoiled Dog!

People sometimes think of a dog as a product, when in fact a dog is a process with the breeder (whether planned or random) and owner both affecting how the dog will turn out. It's never a completed task, either. Humans can change their beliefs and behaviors depending on education and experience in life. Similarly, your dog's training must continue, otherwise it can fade or be corrupted. Often people refer to their own dogs or other people's as being "spoiled." What does this mean? Of course it depends on who is using the expression. One Dictionary definition of "spoil" includes the words "to impair the disposition or character of by overindulgence or excessive praise." Impairing (damaging) the disposition (temperament) of a dog is a serious thing to do.

Would overindulgence do this in the case of a dog? It would if that means giving the dog what the dog wants when the dog growls, snaps at or bites a person. That would be teaching the dog that those are the ways you wish to be "asked" for things. Would overindulgence in the form of food damage a dog's temperament? It might if that means making the dog cranky due to pain from overstressed joints. It also might make a dog cranky to be ill with pancreatitis or diabetes. And if the dog asking for food and being given food takes the place of more constructive interaction between human and dog, that isn't building the dog's character.

The same is true of overindulgence by giving the dog his or her way when the dog behaves aggressively toward humans. How can good character develop when the dog learns aggressive behavior by how humans reinforce it? None of this is the dog's fault. Some of the damage can be reversible. The "Nothing in Life is Free" strategy, where a dog has to do something right in order to get each need met, can help work through this kind of problem. The strategy probably works more because it causes the human to learn how better to manage a dog than because the dog needed to be "set straight." The human is the one who messed things up in the first place, not the dog.

Different dogs have been selectively bred for different tasks. Purebreds as well as mixes carry strong genetic behaviors that humans have developed through breeding. Most genetic behaviors also require training in order to come to full expression in dogs, but this is not always the case. For example, terriers may kill certain animals with no training, and may also keep the digging habit when some other breeds have given it up after puppyhood.

When a dog is properly trained and managed, and the genetics are right, the dog is a pleasure to have around people and other animals. This dog can have more privileges. These dogs are often called "spoiled," but nothing could be farther from the truth! Their training, both the established training and the on-going day-to-day training does not make them overindulged or of poor disposition. And like anyone else pursuing a clear purpose in life, these dogs have fine character.

Kind Regards,

Scott and Chris