



# The WoofGang Wag Rag



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Free

## *Making Sense of Dog Play*

Dog interactions are so different from human interactions, so much sniffing and snorting and thrashing about. There seem to be as many styles of dog play as there are dogs, so it can be a challenge to discern what *is* play and what isn't. It's no wonder we're at a loss when a fight starts that we never saw coming. Still, there are some basic principles that can help you begin to translate the doggie ballet taking place before your eyes.

### **Howdy Do!**

Polite dog introductions are a joy to behold. Polite dogs will arc toward one another, the more submissive averting his glance in deference, and will do a cursory sniff around the head and neck, followed by a more prolonged sniff of the rear and genitals. Then things will move on... Playful mates will commence with a play bow (front quarters lower than hind quarters) or invite a brisk game of chase. Quieter companions will amble on after making the acquaintance.

My own dog is the poster pup for yucky greeters... straight toward the other dog with a steady gaze, stiff stance and with her ruff up, giving the dog a sniff of proctologic precision, and then, depending on the other

dog, she will cautiously tee (put her chin over the back of the other dog) to see what she can get away with. Trista's version of talkin' trash!



The show of hackles, also known as piloerection, is an indication of a heightened state of arousal. It is not necessarily an indication of a dog about to act aggressively, though, depending on the dog, the winds could certainly blow in that direction. But what it communicates to dogs in the vicinity is that she is in an aroused, unstable state. Not long afterwards will come the shake-off, when the dog will shake her body as if shaking off water. This communicates to the group that she is now in a calmer, more stable state and is not as likely to be rash or reactive.

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## *\$25 Intro Training Offer*

Get a 30-minute introductory basic training session for \$25 or apply it towards a 4-session package and get the 30-minute session FREE! (Offer details based on location.) Call **WoofGang** at **646.345.5116** to make an appointment.

## *Predatory Drift*

A serious concern inherent in size disparities between dogs (or between a dog and a cat) is that of predatory drift, in which the smaller animal moves or vocalizes in a prey-like way that triggers a sudden predatory response from the larger dog or a group of dogs. It can be a recipe for potentially deadly disaster that does not go away with time; even after years of living together peacefully, a tragic incident can still occur. And it poses a real danger in dog runs when small and large dogs play together.

Call **WoofGang** at **646.345.5116** for help with your prey-driven dog or with building harmony in your multi-animal household.

## *About the Trainer*

Dog trainer **Laura Garber**, CPDT, is a professional member of the Association of Pet Dog Trainers (APDT) and is certified by the Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers (CCPDT), the first national certification for dog trainers.

Laura authors articles about dogs and dog behavior in dog-centric magazines and on-line resources.

Laura believes strongly in strengthening the bond between human and companion animal. For this reason, she regards training as an exercise in building relationship rather than obedience. Such an approach promises greater understanding and symbiosis within our family packs.

Log on to [www.myWoofGang.com](http://www.myWoofGang.com).

## *Do Your Business!*

Want your dog to eliminate on command? It's easy! Look for cues that she's preparing to go, like circling or sniffing. Then use your command, like "Do your business." Softly praise her as she goes. You can even give her a treat afterwards to sweeten the deal. If you do it enough times, she'll eventually "do the deed" on command!

## ***Making Sense of Dog Play (cont.)***

### **Dogs At Play**

The purpose of play is to rehearse important natural behaviors: hunting, fighting, fleeing, and sexual behavior. So it's not surprising that activities such as biting and chasing are part of play. And, though most dogs have been neutered, it is perfectly natural that their play would include sexually derived behaviors like mounting and humping.

Different breeds tend to practice different play styles, and this should be a consideration when choosing a playmate. Standard poodles prefer games of chase accented by polite play bows and are completely put off by the rude body slamming, paw jabbing style of boxers.

Another important characteristic of good play is role reversal. The chaser becomes the chased; the biter becomes the bitten. For this reason, size disparity is undesirable. How frustrating for a little terrier to be consistently manhandled by its pit bull playmate, even if both dogs like to wrestle! Like a feather-weight sparring with a super-heavyweight.

An equally serious concern inherent in size disparities is that of predatory drift, in which a smaller dog (or cat) moves in a prey-like way that triggers a sudden predatory response from a larger dog or a group of dogs. This is a recipe for potentially deadly disaster.

### **Quarrels Happen**

Short, noisy quarrels are a natural occurrence in dog interactions and can be instructive, given that the receiver understands and respects the message of the sender. Should the message be ignored, things can escalate.

My clients have a rude adolescent male dobie mix named Sparky\*, who has proven to be too strong a force for a great many dogs. In a recent play session between him and Trista, my 4-year-old German Shepherd female,

Sparky put his forelegs on Trista's back immediately upon meeting her. In human terms, this is a bit like punching a stranger playfully in the arm upon meeting him on the street. In response, Trista snarked him, growling and turning to bite and chase him away – a perfectly appropriate correction for a mature female to give a rude young hoodlum. In doggie terms, she was saying “Knock it off, you whippersnapper! Show a little respect!” Sparky's response was similarly appropriate; he took the snarking respectfully, fleeing from her and not pushing his luck. Over the course of their interaction, they hit their stride – Sparky gamely allowed Trista the joy of the chase, occasionally bouncing into her to incite her to play but never again jumping up on her.

Sparky needs many such interactions with dogs who can offer an appropriate, inhibited correction. Without such an education, his behavior could someday elicit a more dangerous response from a dog with less tolerance, a dog who will escalate his response into a fight.

### **Take a Break**

Aroused play, when allowed to continue for too long, can spiral into a fight. Dogs will often take short breaks from play, giving themselves a chance for a bit of a breather. If they are not doing it voluntarily, you must step in and impose a short break every two to three minutes. Call your dog away or go get him; then ask for a “sit” or “down” for 30 seconds before releasing him back to play.

For this article in its entirety, log on to [www.myWoofGang.com](http://www.myWoofGang.com).



## ***Ask Woofie...***

*Woofie, Zoey is my 6 month-old Lhasa. [With] house breaking, I think I'm 95% there, but I'm not sure if she's making the connection, or if I'm just getting her out enough (and once in a while not) as I still get an occasional pee inside. What I noticed yesterday is that at one point she couldn't focus on anything, went from toy to toy and then to bad behaviors (plants, etc) around the house. After that, I saw that she'd peed, so when I noticed that same behavior later, I took her out, and she went. Maybe that's her sign? And is there a way to get a clearer sign?*

*Margie*

*Hiya, Margie! Success with house-training requires very vigilant attention on your part to make sure that you always catch her and get her outside in time so that she has many experiences of correct behavior (and hopefully NO experiences of the wrong thing). Ultimately you're trying to build habit... habit for going outside, NO habit for inside. Make sure that you take treats with you and that you're there with her when she goes outside so that you can tell her how good she is and give her a treat. Don't just turn her loose in the yard and expect that when she potties out there she knows it's the right thing. Then outside and inside WILL feel the same to her, since neither is getting positive feedback for her.*

*As for her signals, all dogs signal differently. If she's not sure yet that outside's good/inside's bad, then she can't tell you anyway. Use the subtle behaviors you've noticed (circling/sniffing/erratic behavior are typical signs) as a warning that it's time, get her right outside, and give her a treat party! Eventually, when she knows the outside's the right thing, she'll start letting you know she needs to go. Woofie*

To submit your own questions about dogs and dog behavior, email [info@mywoofgang.com](mailto:info@mywoofgang.com) and include “Ask Woofie” in the subject line.