

How to Be a Pack Leader



Author Harper West

The animal world can teach us much about improving our emotional health and relationships, says author and psychologist Harper West. We should become more like "alpha" dogs or "pack leaders," she writes in her new book, "Pack Leader Psychology." (Available online and at www.PackLeaderPsychology.com, \$12.99 print/\$4.99 ebook)

While training her dog, West learned to be more assertive and discovered that the same skills could be applied to human relationships. She then transformed her personality from submissive, abused wife into a self-assured leader of people. Here are some lessons in how anyone can become a human pack leader:

Be Authentic: Dogs are easy to love because they are authentic. When they are joyful, they play; when they are excited, they run and jump. In contrast, many people strategize about how to behave and communicate to gain approval from others. "Submissive" personality types hide their competence to avoid threatening others. "Dominators" threaten others to look competent. "Pack Leaders" are not fearful of rejection, so they behave authentically. Give up trying to impress others. Give yourself permission to be imperfect. You will free yourself from self-judgment and fear of judgment by others.

Be Honest and Assertive: Dogs communicate with each other promptly, clearly and honestly. If a dog approaches too aggressively, another dog will instantly growl, letting the aggressive dog know it should back off. People, however, often shy away from communicating assertively. Honesty is frightening to some people, because they fear the consequences. Confrontation also goes against our primal desire to get along: We don't want to offend someone and get kicked out of our "pack!" Some people go to extremes in handling confrontation. Submissives avoid conflict to get others to like them. They have an unspoken pact: "I won't criticize you, if you won't criticize me." Dominators challenge to keep others from criticizing. Both Submissives and Dominators have low self-worth, making them fearful of criticism. A Pack Leader has good self-worth and is not dependent on the approval of others. Pack Leaders communicate; they don't manipulate.

Be Accountable: Dogs quickly accept punishment and move on. Dominator personality types have difficulty handling criticism and taking responsibility. They've learned to manage feelings of shame by lashing out and

blaming others. Submissives lash in at themselves in self-blame. They can be overly responsible, perfectionistic and people pleasing. To become a human Pack Leader, face your fears of criticism and imperfection and take responsibilities for your behaviors, thoughts and feelings.

Be Respectful: Many dog owners fail to become Pack Leaders because they are more concerned with trying to be the dog's friend than earning respect. This eagerness for approval is a sign of weakness and the dog will not respect or obey the owner. Pack Leaders know that love and friendship flow out of respect, not the other way around. Stop trying to be everyone's friend (a Submissive behavior). Stop bullying others (a Dominator behavior). These behaviors are disrespectful and manipulative. Parents especially should focus more on fostering respect and not being overly eager for an approving friendship with a child.

Be Instinctive: Anyone who has owned a dog has marveled at its intuitive natures. Dogs are known to predict earthquakes and storms and can detect cancer. In contrast, Submissives and Dominators are so focused on the reactions of others they often fail to pay attention to intuitive perceptions. A Pack Leader can trust his instincts because he is calm and self-aware. Worrying about what other people think gets in the way of your intuition empowering you.

Be a Leader, Not a Controller: If a dog is off the leash, an owner can't force it to come. The dog only chooses to obey because it respects the owner as a Pack Leader. In human relationships, especially parenting, control often enters the picture. Submissives try to control by being placating and pleasing. Dominators control through intimidation or emotional drama. Pack Leaders know they can't control others, only themselves. Actually, by trying to control others you expose your fear of disapproval. When you exist only for everyone else's approval, you constantly risk rejection. When you rely only on your own approval, the risk of rejection evaporates.

Most people today are far too concerned about their emotional self-preservation to truly care about others. They are fearful and hyper-vigilant in avoiding rejection, judgment and shame. They have very little emotional energy left to worry about the needs of others. A "Pack Leader" has none of those fears, so they are naturally free to be empathic and compassionate.

"Pack Leader Psychology" is a unique combination of self-help book and deeply personal memoir that arose out of Harper West's experiences in life and dog training. Based on the elemental wisdom of the animals and the latest research on human social psychology, "Pack Leader Psychology" gives readers tools to transform their personalities and relationships. Take a quiz to find out if you are a Pack Leader at www.PackLeaderPsychology.com.

SUNSCREEN DO'S & DON'TS: EWG Report on Dangers Hidden in Your Sunscreen Lotion



Environmental Working Group (EWG) recently published a report on their website at www.ewg.org on what to look for in sun tan lotions and sunscreens. Here are the guidelines:

1) **No Spray Sunscreens:** Given the ease of applying them on squirming kids and hard-to-reach areas, these super-popular aerosolized sunscreens may seem like a dream come true. But there's growing concern that these sprays pose serious inhalation risks. They also make it too easy to apply too

little or to miss a spot, leaving bare skin exposed to harmful rays.

2) **No Super-High SPFs:** Products with sky-high SPFs may protect against sunburn but could leave your skin exposed to damaging UVA rays. Although the letters SPF stand for "sun protection factor," this refers only to protection against UVB radiation, which burns the skin. It has nothing to do with the sun's UVA rays, which penetrate deep into the skin, suppress the immune system, accelerate skin aging and may cause skin cancer. These high-SPF products may tempt people to stay in the sun too long, suppressing sunburns but upping the risk of other kinds of skin damage. The FDA is considering limiting SPF claims to 50+, as is done in other countries.

3) **No Oxybenzone:** Commonly used in sunscreens, the chemical oxybenzone penetrates the skin, gets into the bloodstream and acts like estrogen in the body. It can also trigger allergic reactions. Data are preliminary, but studies have found a link between higher concentrations of oxybenzone and health harms. One study has linked oxybenzone to endometriosis in older women; another found that women with higher levels of oxybenzone during pregnancy had lower birth weight daughters.

4) **No Loose Powder Sunscreens:** Loose powder sunscreens are designed to be used on the face and scalp. They often contain tiny particles of zinc and titanium that can potentially offer strong UV protection if enough sticks to the skin. But they end up in the lungs, too, inhaled from a cloud of airborne particles each time they're applied. There, they can cause damage. Based on studies of rats and people who work in dusty environments, the International Agency for Research on Cancer classifies inhaled

titanium dioxide as "possibly carcinogenic to humans." Tiny zinc particles also irritate the lungs and could pass through skin into the body. FDA's current over-the-counter rules no longer allow loose powders, including loose powder makeup, to advertise an SPF or make claims of sun protection. But it granted small companies an extra year to remove their powders from the market. The bottom line? If there's a chance you'll breathe it, don't buy it. EWG recommends that people stick to creams and avoid powders and sprays.

5) **No Retinyl Palmitate:** When used in a night cream, this form of vitamin A is supposed to have anti-aging effects. But on sun-exposed skin, retinyl palmitate may speed development of skin tumors and lesions, according to government studies. Why is this "inactive ingredient" allowed in sunscreens intended for use in the sun? Good question. The FDA has yet to rule on the safety of retinyl palmitate in skin care products, but EWG recommends that consumers avoid sunscreens containing this chemical.

6) **No Combined Sunscreen/Bug Repellents:** Skip products that combine bug repellent with sunscreen. Why? For starters, bugs are typically not a problem during the hours when UV exposure peaks. Also, sunscreen may need to be reapplied more frequently than repellent, or vice versa. We recommend that you avoid using repellents on your face, too. Studies indicating that combining sunscreens and repellents leads to increased skin absorption of the repellent ingredients.

7) **No Sunscreen Towelettes:** FDA's 2011 sunscreen rules ended the sale of sunscreen wipes and towelettes, but small companies have been granted another year to remove them from their product lines. One key question is whether you get enough sunscreen on your skin to ensure sun protection. EWG thinks these on-the-go packets are not worth the risk. So leave these and similar products on the shelf:

8) **No Tanning Oils:** Tanning oils are simply a bad idea. They promote risky behavior, encouraging users seek out intense sunshine that results in skin damage and increased risk of developing skin cancer. Although some tanning oils contain sunscreen ingredients, the levels are always very low and offer little, if any, protection from the sun's rays. Tanning oils are also associated with an increased danger of sunburn. Avoid products with SPF values lower than 15 or that don't contain either zinc oxide or avobenzone for UVA protection.

For more info, visit: www.ewg.org