

# Discovering Your Dog's Personality

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Your dog was born with a set of instinctive behaviors that he inherited from his parents. These behaviors can be grouped into three broad categories – prey, pack and defense – called *drives*. How many behaviors a dog has in each drive, will determine his temperament, his personality and how he perceives the world.

## BEHAVIORS IN EACH DRIVE

**Prey** drive includes those inherited behaviors associated with hunting, killing prey and eating. It is activated by motion, sound and smell. Behaviors associated with prey drive are seeing, hearing, scenting, tracking, stalking, chasing anything that moves, pouncing, high-pitched barking, jumping up, biting, killing, pulling down, shaking, tearing and ripping apart, carrying, eating, digging and burying.

You see these behaviors when your dog is chasing the cat, or gets excited and barks in a high-pitched tone of voice as the cat runs up a tree. Your dog may also shake and rip apart soft toys and bury dog biscuits in the couch.

**Pack** drive consists of behaviors associated with being part of a pack, including reproductive behaviors. Dogs are pack animals, which means adhering to a social hierarchy governed by rules of behavior to assure order. In the case of a dog, the ability to be part of a group translates itself into a willingness to work with us as part of a team.

**Pack** drive is stimulated by rank order in the social hierarchy. Physical contact, playing and behaviors associated with social interaction with other dogs, as well as reproductive behaviors, such as licking, mounting, washing ears and all courting gestures, are part of pack drive.

A dog with many of these behaviors is the one that follows you around the house, is happiest when with you, loves to be petted and groomed, and likes to work with you. Such a dog may be unhappy when left alone for long periods.

**Defense** drive is governed by the instincts for survival and self-preservation, and consists of both **fight** and **flight** behaviors.

Defense drive is more complex than prey and pack drive, because the same stimulus that can make a dog aggressive (fight), can also elicit avoidance (flight) behaviors, especially in the young dog.

Fight behaviors tend not to be fully developed until the dog is over two years of age, although tendencies towards these behaviors will be seen at an earlier age.

Examples of fight behaviors are a dog that "stands tall," stares at other dogs and likes to "strut his stuff." He will stand his ground with his ears and whiskers pointed forward and his tail held up. He will go toward unfamiliar objects or situations, and his hackles will go up from his shoulders to his neck. He may guard his food, toys or territory from other dogs or people, and may dislike being petted or groomed. Such a dog will lie in front of doorways or cupboards, making his owner walk around him.

Flight behaviors demonstrate that the dog is unsure. Examples are hackles that go up the full length of the body, not just at the neck, hiding or running away from new situations, a dislike of being touched by strangers or a general lack of confidence. Young dogs tend to exhibit more flight behaviors than older dogs. Freezing (not going forward or backward) is generally considered *inhibited* flight behavior.

## **YOUR DOG'S PERSONALITY**

To help you understand your dog's behaviors, Jack and Wendy Volhard cataloged ten behaviors in each drive and created the **Canine Personality Profile**. The ten behaviors chosen are the ones that most closely represent the strengths of the dog in each of the drives. The Profile does not pretend to include all behaviors seen in a dog.

*Wendy Volhard's*  
Dog Personality Profile  
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The results of the Profile will give you a good starting point for understanding why your dog does what he does. This understanding will help you make his training a positive and enjoyable experience for both of you.

When completing the Profile, keep in mind that it was devised for a house dog or pet with an enriched environment and not a dog tied out or kept solely in a kennel; such dogs have fewer opportunities to express as many behaviors as a house dog. Answers should indicate those behaviors your dog would exhibit if he had **not** already been trained to do otherwise. For example, did he jump on people or the counter to steal food, before he was trained not to do so? Other behaviors, in turn, are only seen in a training context, such as during training with distractions.

When completing the Profile, assign the following point values to your answers:

Almost always – 7–10; Sometimes – 4–6; Hardly ever – 0–3.

You may not have had the chance to observe all of these behaviors, in which case you leave the answer blank.

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**When presented with the opportunity, does your dog?**

1	Sniff the ground or air?	
2	Get along with other dogs?	
3	Stand his ground or investigates strange objects or sounds	
4	Run away from new situations?	
5	Get excited by moving objects, such as bikes or squirrels?	
6	Get along with people?	
7	Like to play tug-of-war games to win?	
8	Hide behind you when he feels he can't cope?	
9	Stalk cats, other dogs, or things in the grass?	
10	Bark when left alone?	
11	Bark or growl in a deep tone of voice?	
12	Act fearfully in unfamiliar situations?	
13	When excited, bark in a high-pitched voice?	
14	Solicit petting, or like to snuggle with you?	
15	Guard his territory?	
16	Tremble or whine when unsure?	
17	Pounce on his toys?	
18	Like to be groomed?	
19	Guard his food or toys?	
20	Cower or turn upside down when reprimanded?	
21	Shake and "kill" his toys?	
22	Seek eye contact with you?	
23	Dislike being petted?	
24	Act reluctant to come close to you when called?	
25	Steal food or garbage?	
26	Follow you around like a shadow?	
27	Guard his owner(s)?	
28	Have difficulty standing still when groomed?	
29	Like to carry things in his mouth?	
30	Play a lot with other dogs?	
31	Dislike being groomed or petted?	
32	Cower or cringe when a stranger bends over him?	
33	Wolf down his food?	
34	Jump up to greet people?	
35	Like to fight other dogs?	
36	Urinate during greeting behavior?	
37	Like to dig and/or bury things?	
38	Show reproductive behaviors, such as mounting?	
39	Get picked on by older dogs when he was a young dog?	
40	Tend to bite when cornered?	

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### Scoring the Profile:

Prey	Pack	D - Fight	D - Flight
1.	2.	3.	4.
5.	6.	7.	8.
9.	10.	11.	12.
13.	14.	15.	16.
17.	18.	19.	20.
21.	22.	23.	24.
25.	26.	27.	28.
29.	30.	31.	32.
33.	34.	35.	36.
37.	38.	39.	40.

Total Prey	Total Pack	Total D Fight	Total D Flight

### WHAT THE SCORES MEAN

Not surprisingly, the results of the Profile tend to be breed specific. If your dog was bred to hunt or herd – think Labrador and Border Collie – chances are that he is highest in prey drive, followed by pack, fight somewhere below 50 and a few flight behaviors. If he was bred to guard or protect – think German Shepherd – his score for fight behaviors will probably be well above 50, perhaps a few flight behaviors, but still many prey and pack behaviors. A dog bred for drafting – think Bernese Mountain Dog – should be high in pack, low in fight and have few prey behaviors – you would not want him to chase after a cat with his little cart bouncing behind. If you have an All American, he will have the same mixture of behaviors, with the predominant number determined by his ancestry.

The majority of dogs are high in prey, which only makes sense in light of the majority of the tasks they were bred to perform. Unfortunately, it is also the drive that is the most irritating to you, his owner, and the one that gets the dog into trouble. What does he do when you take him for a walk? Pull you here, there and everywhere, with his nose on the ground following various scents, or walk quietly at your side? When he spots a squirrel, does he set off in hot pursuit or ignore it? When you call him, does he come or keep going in the other direction?

## **NOW WHAT?**

Before you can use the results of the Profile, you first have to take a look at what you are trying to teach your dog, we are going to call him Felix, and which drive he has to be in to respond to a given command.

For most of the commands you want Felix to know, he needs to be in pack drive – walking on leash without pulling, sit and stay, go lie down and come when called. Responding to these commands requires him to be in pack drive, that is, doing something for you. You certainly don't want him to be in prey (chase), or defense drives (guard or flee). All else being equal, a dog with many Pack behaviors (more than sixty) will have no difficulty with learning these exercises.

Prey drive behaviors, those required for retrieving and jumping, although not necessary for basic obedience commands, come in handy in the training of the dog that has few Pack behaviors. Through the use of a treat or toy, you can exploit prey behaviors to teach a pack exercise.

Theoretically, dogs do not need defense drive (fight) behaviors for basic training, but the absence of these behaviors has important ramifications. It is pivotal and determines how the dog has to be trained.

The beauty of the drives theory, if used correctly, is that it gives you a tool to overcome areas where a dog is weak. For example, it can be used to teach a dog with few pack behaviors, how to walk on a loose leash by using prey behaviors.

## **BRINGING OUT DRIVES**

Following are the basic rules for bringing out drives:

1. Prey drive is elicited by the use of motion -- hand signals (down or come) -- a high-pitched tone of voice, or an object of attraction (defined as anything the dog will actively work for, such as a stick, toy or food), chasing or being chased, and leaning backward with your body.
2. Pack drive is elicited by physical affection, verbal praise and smiling at the dog. Grooming, and playing bring out Pack drive behaviors.
3. Defense drive behavior is elicited by leaning over the dog, either from the front or the side, checking (a sharp tug on the leash) or a harsh tone of voice.

## **SWITCHING DRIVES**

Felix can instantaneously switch himself from one drive to another. Picture him playing with his favorite toy (Prey), when the doorbell rings. He drops the toy and starts to bark (Defense). You open the door and it is a neighbor whom Felix knows. He goes to greet the visitor (Pack) and returns to play with his toy (Prey).

During training your task will be to figure out how to switch your dog from one drive into another. For example, you are teaching Felix to walk on a loose leash in the yard when a squirrel scampers up a tree. Felix spots it, runs to the end of the leash, straining and barking excitedly in a high-pitched voice. He is in full-blown Prey drive. Now you have to get him back into Pack where he needs to be in order to walk at your side. To get Felix from Prey into Pack, you first have to go through Defense, at least in the teaching process and until he has learned to do it on command.

The precise manner in which you get Felix back into Pack -- remember, you must go through Defense -- depends on the strength of his Defense drive. If he has a large number of Defense (fight) behaviors, you can give her a crisp tug and release on the leash (check), which switches him out of Prey into Defense. To get him into Pack, touch him gently on the top of the head, smile and tell him how clever he.

If he is low in Defense (fight) behaviors, a check may overpower him, and a voice communication, such as "Ah, ah" will be sufficient to put him into Defense, after which you put him into Pack drive.

For the dog that has few fight behaviors and a large number of flight behaviors, a check is also counter-productive. Body postures, such as bending over the dog, or a deep tone of voice are usually enough to elicit Defense drive. Your dog, by his response to your training -- cowering, rolling upside down, not wanting to come to you for the training session -- will show you when you overpower him, thereby making learning difficult, if not impossible.

### **THE BASIC RULES FOR SWITCHING:**

1. From Prey into Pack in the teaching process, you go through Defense. How you put your dog into Defense will depend on the number of Defense (fight) behaviors he has. As a general rule, the more Defense (fight) behaviors the dog has, the firmer the check needs to be.

As the dog learns, a barely audible voice communication or a slight change in body posture will suffice to encourage your dog to go from Prey through Defense into Pack drive. Once Felix has learned what you want him to know, he switches himself.

2. From Defense into Pack by touching or smiling; and
3. From Pack into Prey with an object (food) or motion.

Applying the concept of drives and learning which drive Felix has to be in and how to get him there will speed up your training process enormously. You will no longer confuse Felix. As you become aware of the impact your body posture and motions have on the drive he is in, your messages will be perfectly clear to your dog. Your body language is congruent with what you are trying to teach. Since Felix is an astute observer of body motions, after all, this is how dogs communicate with each other, he will understand exactly what you want.

## **PRACTICAL APPLICATION**

By looking at your dog's profile, you will know which training techniques work best and are in harmony with your dog's drives. You now have the tools to tailor your training program for your dog.

Defense (fight) – more than sixty, and Defense (flight) less than sixty. Your dog will not be bothered too much by a firm hand.

Body posture is not critical, although incongruent postures on your part will slow down the training. Tone of voice should be firm, but pleasant and non-threatening.

Defense(flight) – 40 or more. Correct body posture and quiet, pleasant tone of voice are critical. Avoid using a harsh tone of voice and any hovering, leaning over or toward your dog. There is a premium on congruent body postures and gentle handling.

Prey – more than sixty. Your dog will respond well to use of treats or a toy during the teaching phase. May need a firm hand, depending on strength of Defense drive (fight), to suppress Prey drive when in high gear, such as when chasing a cat or spotting a squirrel. Easily motivated, but also easily distracted by motion or moving objects.

Signals will mean more to this dog than verbal commands. Premium on using body, hands and leash correctly so as not to confuse the dog.

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Prey – less than sixty. Your dog is probably not easily motivated by food or other objects, but is also not easily distracted by moving objects.

Pack – more than sixty. Responds readily to praise and touch. Your dog likes to be with you and will respond with little guidance.

Pack – less than sixty. Start praying. Felix probably does not care whether he is with you or not. He likes to do his own thing and is not easily motivated. Your only hope is to rely on Prey drive in training. Usually breed specific for dogs bred to work independently of man.

Following are a few examples of different profiles:

Low prey, low pack, low defense – the dog will be difficult to motivate and probably does not require any training. Needs extra patience in case training is attempted since there are few behaviors with which to work. On the plus side, this dog is unlikely to get into trouble, will not disturb anyone, will make a good family pet and does not mind being left alone for considerable periods of time.

High prey, low pack, low defense – this dog will give the appearance of having an extremely short attention span, but is perfectly capable of concentrating on what he finds interesting. Training will require the channeling of his energy to get him to do what you want. You will need lots of patience because the dog will have to be taught mainly through prey drive.

High in prey, low in pack, high in defense (fight) – this dog is independent and not easy to live with as a pet and companion. Highly excitable by movement and may attack anything that comes within its range. Does not care much about people or other dogs and will do well as a guard dog. Pack exercises such as heeling need to be built up through prey. A real challenge.

Important hint: if Felix is high in defense (fight), you need to work especially diligently on -- and frequently review -- your leadership exercises. If your dog is high in prey, you also need to work on these exercises to control him around door ways and moving objects. If your dog is high in both prey and fight, you may need professional help.

High prey, low pack, high defense (flight) – a dog that is easily startled and/or frightened. He needs quiet and reassuring handling. Not a good choice for children.

Low prey, high pack and low defense – this is a real charmer. He will follow you around all day and it is doubtful that he will get into trouble. Likes to be with you and is not interested in chasing.

Medium (50–75) prey, pack and defense (fight) – a dog that is easy to train and motivate. Mistakes on your part are not critical.

By now you have gathered that the easiest dogs are those that are balanced among all drives. No matter what you do, the dog seems to be able to figure out you want. If you are lucky enough to have a dog like that, take good care of him. By applying the principles of drives, he will do well by you.

## **SUMMARY**

- 1) Prey drive is elicited by motion, sounds and odors.
- 2) Pack drive is elicited by an inviting body posture, touching and a friendly voice.
- 3) Defense drive is elicited by a threatening body posture, hitting and an unfriendly voice.
- 4) The dog can switch itself at will from one drive to another.
- 5) To switch the dog from prey into pack drive you must go through defense.
- 6) Your dog's profile tells you the correct way to train.