

the love languages of dogs

by Melanie Travis Schlaginhaufen

According to author Gary Chapman, Ph.D., in his best selling book entitled, *The Five Languages of Love*, humans have five love languages. He identifies them as words of encouragement, quality time, acts of service, touch and gift giving. Dr. Chapman explains that we can only perceive we are loved when we are communicated to in our language of love.

Dogs are really no different. Dogs have a preference, similar to our love languages, something they enjoy most or perceive most clearly as affection and unconditional acceptance. The dog's love languages relate closely to "inherent drives", for example, a dog with high pack drive is likely to be a "follow me" dog. But the dog's love language involves much more than just genetic material—love language can be a preference derived from early socialization experiences, or lack of them. And I suspect that if we learn the love language(s) of our dogs, they will bond with us much closer.

Here are five love languages I've identified in dogs: baby talk, follow me, play-adventure, snuggling and cookie monsters! All dogs like to eat, play, go on walks, be petted or scratched—dogs are the companions of their owners, right? Nonetheless, they have preferences.

Baby Talk Dogs. Every dog likes sweet talk, but some dogs actually seem to need it. It's extremely valuable, for example, in alleviating apprehension in a dog—like making a moderately fearful or shy dog feel assured that you're ok, that you pose no threat. Dogs who love baby talk will "eat up" this seemingly silly, universal instinctive way of talking to babies and puppies alike. These dogs even prefer babytalk to treats and toys.

Follow Me Dogs. These dogs want to be with their owners wherever they go. In the kitchen. Back to the bedroom. Down the hall to the office. They just want to be near their owner. It's the very thing that makes them feel secure and happy. These dogs may not even care to be snuggled. They are typically not fond of being crated—in fact, it is stressful for them and, if crated excessively, they may not bond as well with their owner. Usually these dogs bond closest if they sleep in the owner's bedroom, beside the bed. During warmer weather, when they cannot go on daily car errands, it is still important to take these dogs to the park, or on a short drive once or twice weekly (dogs have trouble understanding changes in our schedule that are related to weather).

Snuggling Dogs. Snuggling dogs are easily recognized—they want to be touched, cuddled, rubbed, etc. If they are little dogs we know them as "the perfect lap dog". If they're big dogs, they'll be resting their heads on our knees or feet—or pawing for attention. Certain aspects of training can be challenging—like getting the dog to stay when you walk away—but a training program designed to build the dog's confidence makes this easy to overcome.

Cookie Monsters. For some dogs receiving treats is their favorite form of interaction with their owner. They like to work for food. They respond enthusiastically and consistently to most any treat. Give them a cookie and they'll be your best friend. When I train these types of dogs, I use the slot machine technique and avoid the gumball machine: Gumball machines pay off every single time, right? But not slot machines—and they're much more addictive. You never know when you might win a little—or even hit the jackpot! Dogs enjoy this kind of variable reinforcement and it teaches them to eventually work without food. Keep in mind when working with a dog with high food drive, however, that it is important to develop their secondary love language as well, because some of these dogs become so frantic when food is present, that they will fail to concentrate on their owner. They may need to be handfed, slowly, in order to learn some impulse control in relationship to food, and to understand that all food comes from their owners. Work with an experienced trainer if you are having trouble figuring out how to develop a bond with your dog that involves activities other than just food treats. .

Play-Adventure Dogs. These dogs live to have a good time. They're usually very social, at least within their own family unit. They choose their favorite person by who likes to have the most fun. Play-adventure can be chase games, fetch, swimming, long walks, rides in the car—these dogs bond when they're having these types of activities with their owners. Sometimes they're misunderstood because they usually don't have the need to be as close to their owner and they may not like to snuggle. But what's perceived as an independent streak or stubbornness is actually just a preference, or even an inherited drive, a real need for play. For these dogs we design training programs that are full of fun and games—keep them from becoming bored and they are less likely to try to "skip school". These dogs are usually bright and easy to work with once you understand their motivation.

I've worked for many years with dogs and their loving, committed owners. Sometimes I find the owner naturally relating to his dog in a manner similar to the way he perceives love—like wanting to snuggle. And that's only natural. But sometimes the dog's love language is different from ours, in which case we must make an effort to relate to our dog in his own love language. The disappointment and hurt can go away when the owner understands, in fact, how very much he or she is loved and valued—and how to express his or her love to the dog.

Now, here are a few questions for all of us to consider:

- ***Are there other canine love languages?
Can a dog's love language change—in time, with environment, etc.?***
- ***How closely is the dog's need for security related to his choice of love language?***
- ***What things contributed to a dog's love language—early socialization, breed, etc?***

What do you think? E-mail us at knowingdogs@hotmail.com

